LAPHAM'S QUARTERLY

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EDUCATION


SCHOOL BUS

LAPHAM'S
QUARTERLY

The roots of education are bitter, but the fruit is sweet.

—*Aristotle, c. 330* BC

Student with tuba, Mississippi, 1976. Photograph by Nathan Benn.

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LAPHAM'S QUARTERLY

EDUCATION

Introductory

Voices in Time

MORNING BELL

Voices in Time

STORY TIME

The Allegory of the Sorbonne, by Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, 1889.

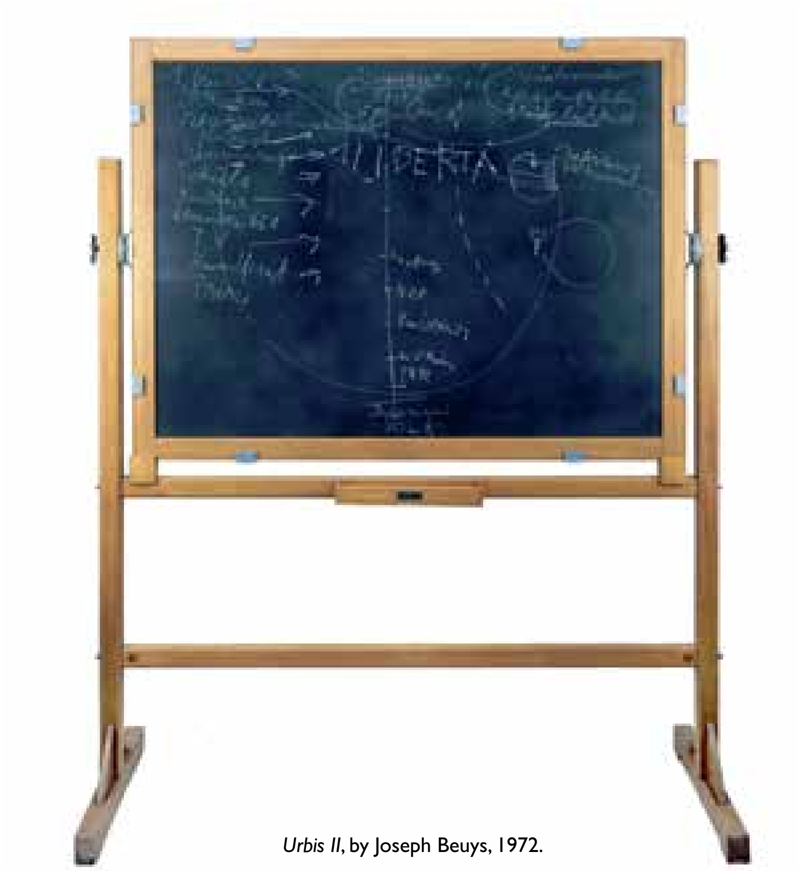


Voices in Time



Voices in Time

HOMEWORK



Urbis II, by Joseph Beuys, 1972.

Further Remarks

ESSAYS

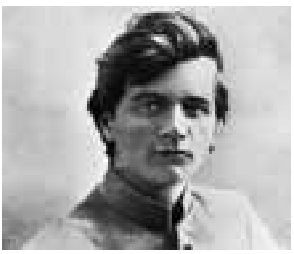
DEPARTMENTS

Many of the passages in this issue have been abbreviated without the use of ellipses; some punctuation has been modified, and while misspellings have been corrected, archaic grammar and word usage mostly remains unchanged. The words are faithful to the original texts.

Among the Contributors



In 1896 educator **Maria Montessori** (1870–1952) became the first woman to graduate in medicine from the University of Rome. Eleven years later, in a Roman slum, she opened her first Casa dei Bambini, a preschool for children aged three to six. Montessori was the first educator to use child-size tables and chairs in the classroom.



Between 1906 and 1914 Soviet writer **Andrey Platonov** (1899–1951) attended church and town schools in his native city of Voronezh. Starting in 1914 he worked as an engineer's assistant and a caster at a pipe factory. "I lived and languished," he later wrote, "because life turned me straightaway from a child into an adult, denying me a youth."



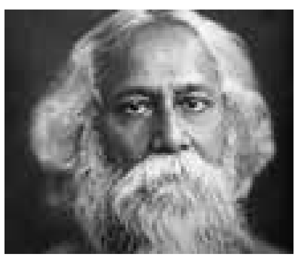
When writer **Helen DeWitt** (1957–) arrived as a student at Smith College in Massachusetts in 1975, she realized she had "a very ahistorical take on the world. I imagined that the women's colleges would still have the intellectual focus and dedication that they had when they were founded."



Persian historian and philosopher **Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi** (c. 923–1023) spent his youth in Baghdad studying law and hadith. "His intellectual nonconformism and unflinching promotion of humanist ideals," wrote one scholar in 1990, "made him a suspect figure in the eyes of many Muslims."



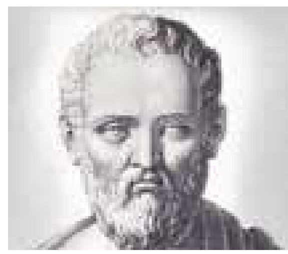
At an early age, writer **Aiping Mu** (1951–) was sent to a state-run boarding school in a former imperial palace that had been established in Beijing for children of elite military officials. At eighteen, as an unwilling participant in Mao Zedong's rural education program, she was sent to a remote village in northern China.



Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) received his early education at home, where he was taught by private tutors; the Bengali poet did not enjoy the time he later spent in "mills of learning." He attended five different schools in Calcutta as a boy and hated them all. "So long as I was forced to attend school, I felt an unbearable torture," he wrote.



Scottish writer **Muriel Spark** (1918–2006) did not attend university, partly because "many older girls who were studying at Edinburgh University in those days were humanly rather dull and earnest, without adult style or charm." She instead studied secretarial skills and worked in a department store.



Athenian rhetorician **Isocrates** (436 BC–338 BC) decided that he was too nervous to become a conventional orator. He turned instead to education and spent more than forty years in Athens teaching students who could afford his heavy fees.



In 1924 *Time* magazine noted that American novelist **Owen Johnson** (1878–1952) "is thoroughly of New York City. He likes it. He likes its people even though he may recognize their charming weaknesses. He enjoys its clubs and its life. He will impress you, when you chance to meet him, as a pleasant, somewhat detached gentleman who looks at life with the eyes of a reporter."



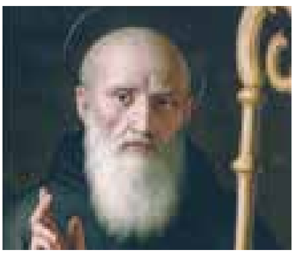
American novelist **Saul Bellow** (1915–2005) graduated from Tuley High School in Chicago's Humboldt Park neighborhood. In 1974, after students protested the curriculum and demanded a name change, the high school was renamed Roberto Clemente High School.



In 1895 civil rights activist **W.E.B. Du Bois** (1868–1963) became the first African American to earn a PhD from Harvard University. His dissertation, "The Suppression of the African Slave Trade," became the first volume in the Harvard Historical Studies series.



Poet **Audre Lorde** (1934–1992) graduated from Hunter College High School on Manhattan's Upper East Side and earned her master's degree in library science from Columbia University. Between 1961 and 1968 she worked as a librarian in Mount Vernon, New York, and New York City.



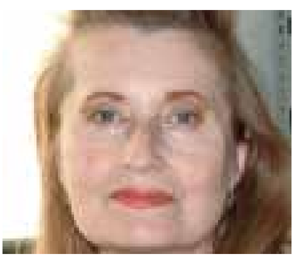
The Christian saint known as **Benedict of Nursia** (c. 480–c. 547) defined precepts for monks and for the administration of monastic communities. He called for monks to serve a full year's probation, followed by a solemn vow to obey the rules as mediated by the abbot, who was elected for life and maintained supreme power.



Swiss writer **Fleur Jaeggy** (1940–) was born in Switzerland and grew up speaking French, German, and Italian. She has lived in Italy for the past five decades. "In general, I don't think I have a homeland," she told an interviewer in 2021. "But the rare times that I go to Zurich, I have the impression that I know the city very well."



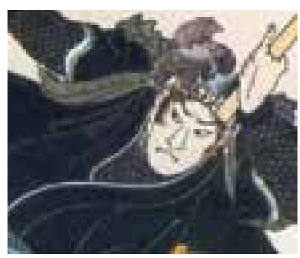
President **Abraham Lincoln** (1809–1865) attended no more than one year of school. "I never saw Abe after he was twelve that he didn't have a book in his hand or in his pocket," said one childhood friend. "It didn't seem natural to see a feller read like that."



"People with a herd instinct hold mediocrity in high esteem," wrote the Austrian novelist **Elfriede Jelinek** (1946–). "They praise it as having great value. They believe they are strong because they are the majority. The middling level has no terrors, no anxieties. They huddle together, indulging in the illusion of warmth."



"The damage wrought by the World's Fair," wrote Chicago architect **Louis Sullivan** (1856–1924) of the antimodernist design of 1893's World's Columbian Exposition, "will last for half a century from its date, if not longer. It has penetrated deep into the constitution of the American mind."



After finding himself on the losing side of the Battle of Sekigahara, the Japanese samurai **Miyamoto Musashi** (1584–1645) committed to developing the perfect sword technique. He claimed to have fought in more than sixty sword fights, many of which were to the death, and to have won them all.

Public Schools

Shaping the citizen body through education





Volksschule | Enlightenment Prussia

BACKGROUND: In 1763, almost fifty years after his predecessor Frederick William I first ordered Prussian parents living "wherever schools exist" to enroll their children, Frederick the Great introduced a revamped, tax-funded, and universally compulsory education system designed by Johann Julius Hecker.

STUDENT BODY: All citizen children of both genders from the ages of five to thirteen.

CURRICULUM: According to Frederick the Great's edict, children in Prussian schools must learn to read and write as well as to "give intelligent advice and answers upon what they have learned."

FACILITIES: One example, the two-room village schoolhouse at Reckahn, south of Brandenburg, was constructed in 1773 according to the highest standards of the period and operated as a school until just after World War II.

Abacus schools | Medieval and Renaissance Tuscany

BACKGROUND: From the mid-thirteenth until the sixteenth century, municipalities in northern Italy established schools to educate children in trade and finance. One historian estimates that in 1338 around one thousand boys attended these schools in Florence.

STUDENT BODY: Boys of the artisan and merchant classes. Many famous artists of the period, including Leonardo da Vinci, received their basic education at such schools.

CURRICULUM: Weights and measures, basic bookkeeping, and most important, how to use an abacus. Many schools used Fibonacci's *Liber abaci*, a 1202 work on mathematics, as a textbook.

FACILITIES: The majority of recorded abacus schools were publicly owned and operated, and it was the duty of local magistrates to provide classroom space and hire instructors. The abacus schools of Florence were private, with facilities supported by and teacher salaries paid by professional guilds or parents.





Ephebeia | Classical Athens

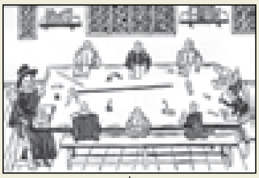
BACKGROUND: In the 330s BC, Athens created a formal program of military and civic education for young men. Previously the Athenian militia had been self-taught.

STUDENT BODY: Initially, all male citizens from the ages of eighteen to twenty were required to complete two years in the *ephebeia* to be considered full citizens.

CURRICULUM: In addition to participating in drills and municipal patrol shifts, students took field trips to civic temples, where they learned stories of Athenian heroics.

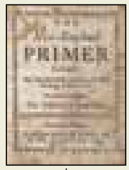
FACILITIES: Training took place at the Lyceum, a complex of fields and buildings located just outside the city walls that had been used for military training since the fifth century BC. When the *ephebeia* was established, the city renovated the Lyceum's gymnasium and built a new palaestra.

The History of American Public Schooling

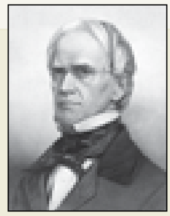


1647
The Massachusetts Bay Colony's Old Deluder Satan Act requires every community of fifty or more householders to designate an instructor to teach local children enough literacy to read the Bible.

1690
The New-England Primer, colonial America's most widely used textbook, is first published.

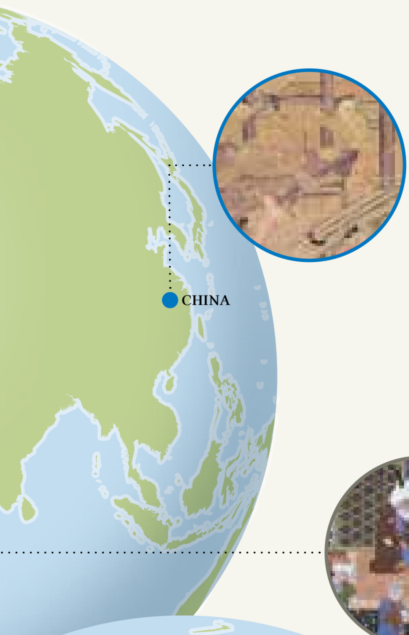


1796
Thomas Jefferson's Act to Establish Public Education, first introduced in 1779, finally passes.



1838
Horace Mann publishes his *Report on Schoolhouses* after visiting three thousand public schools.

1700 1800



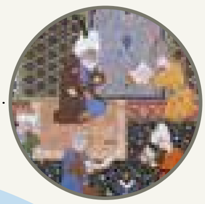
Shexue | Ming China

BACKGROUND: As part of his program of *jiaohua* (transformation through education), Ming dynasty founder Zhu Yuanzhang established community schools across the empire in 1375. Five years later, centralized control of the schools was abolished in response to allegations that “authorities used [them] to harass the people”; village schools persisted, now under local control.

STUDENT BODY: Male children of commoners, from the ages of eight to fifteen.

CURRICULUM: One sixteenth-century official described an ideal curriculum: “Sprinkling and sweeping; answering questions; the etiquette of entering and withdrawing; and the arts of rites, music, archery, charioteering, writing, and arithmetic.”

FACILITIES: A representative school in Suzhou consisted of a central Hall of Correct Learning flanked by study halls and libraries. Two ceremonial arches outside bore the slogans PROMOTE THE REFINED and NURTURE THE BEST.



Kuttab | Islamic Golden Age

BACKGROUND: Possibly modeled on Byzantine church schools, *kuttab* education first appeared in the eighth century during the Umayyad period, and by the ninth century was widespread throughout the Islamic world.

STUDENT BODY: Children from the ages of four to nine. Only male students were allowed in many parts of the Islamic world, but girls were welcome in other regions, especially in Persia.

CURRICULUM: Memorization of the Quran. Students also learned the basics of Arabic or Persian literacy and simple math.

FACILITIES: A room in a neighborhood mosque. “*Kuttab* education was characterized by a strict system of rote learning,” according to one source, with “students sitting on the floor around their teacher in a semicircle writing their lessons on a tablet and then repeating it back for correction.”



Calmecac | Aztec Tenochtitlán

BACKGROUND: Until the Spanish abolished the system in 1521, around a dozen *calmecacs* operated in and around Tenochtitlán.

STUDENT BODY: Boys and girls from the ages of ten to fifteen, usually the children of elites and high-ranking artisans. Children of the lower classes generally attended military schools called *telpochcalli*, but they could attend *calmecacs* if their parents could prepare them for entry.

CURRICULUM: In addition to teaching astronomy, philosophy, history, writing, and music, the *calmecacs* focused on religious texts and rituals. Students were expected to regularly let their own blood as tribute to the gods; failure to do so resulted in corporal punishment.

FACILITIES: Archaeologists have identified *calmecacs* by the presence of eight-foot-tall sculptural elements carved with conch shells and symbols of the god Quetzalcoatl. The European-style College of Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco, the first such institution in the New World, was established on the site of a former *calmecac*.

1839
Establishment of the first state-funded normal school in Massachusetts.

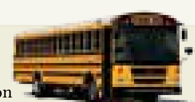
1852
Massachusetts enacts the country’s first mandatory attendance law.

1867
Creation of the federal Department of Education “for the purpose of collecting such statistics and facts as shall show the condition and progress of education.”

1879
First of twenty-six Native boarding schools opens in Carlisle, PA.



1916
John Dewey publishes *Democracy and Education.*



1939
A conference on student transportation establishes national school-bus standards, including their yellow color.

1946
National School Lunch Act.

1954
Brown v. Board of Education.

1972
Title IX prohibits sex-based discrimination in any educational program that receives funding from the federal government.

1900

Map by Haisam Hussein


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HEARTS AND MINDS

by Paul Tough

As the Covid-19 pandemic entered its third year, with inflation rising and the supply chain faltering, many American voters were fixated not on the economy or the virus but on a quite different topic: education. In Virginia, a private-equity multimillionaire won the governor's race by promising to keep public schools safe from gender-neutral bathrooms and critical race theory (*Virginia*, page 77). Across the country, school board meetings were disrupted by death threats and chanted slogans, and school board elections—usually sleepy contests with minimal turnout—became pitched battles over history textbooks, mask mandates, and the contents of school libraries.

For decades education had been considered a staid, responsible topic of conversation in American politics, a subject to be addressed not in passionate diatribes but in carefully reasoned PowerPoint presentations and well-mannered panel discussions. Now, suddenly, Americans were focusing intently on the workings of their local public schools, and they were not at all happy with what they saw.

Political experts and campaign consultants were taken by surprise when schools suddenly assumed center stage in the national debate, but as this issue of *Lapham's Quarterly* demonstrates, our recent battles are nothing new. Schools have always been tangled up with politics; for millennia, they have served as a proxy battlefield for culture warriors of every stripe. Especially in moments of national crisis or social upheaval, classrooms often provide the clearest reflection of a society's deep anxieties about identity, power, and class.

Paul Tough is the author of four books, including The Inequality Machine: How College Divides Us *and* How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character. *He is a contributing writer for* The New York Times Magazine *and a former editor at* Harper's Magazine.

Might Not the Pupil Know More?, by Francisco Goya, 1799.

In Texas, where I live, those anxieties have been on full display in recent months. In a suburb of Dallas, two school board members were arrested for allegedly violating the state's Open Meetings Act by exchanging text messages before a vote. In Katy, just outside Houston, Jerry Craft's award-winning graphic novel *New Kid*, about a Black student who enrolls in an exclusive private school, was pulled from public schools after a local mother launched a petition drive. Texans' fury over public schools found its ultimate expression in 2021 with House Bill 3979 (*Austin, TX*, page 165), which requires social studies teachers to explore controversial issues "from diverse and contending perspectives without giving deference to any one perspective." After the governor signed the bill into law, an administrator in a school district near Fort Worth informed teachers that they were now required, when assigning books describing the evils of the Holocaust, to include texts that offered "opposing" perspectives as well.

It soon became apparent that Texas' new law was intended not so much to protect academic freedom as to curtail it in highly specific ways. For instance, the law carves out a notable exception to its doctrine of "diverse and contending perspectives" in the classroom. Slavery and racism must now be taught in our public schools in one way and one way only: as "deviations from, betrayals of, or failures to live up to the authentic founding principles of the United States, which include liberty and equality." Texas social studies teachers may want to skip over the authentic founding principle, enshrined in Article I of the Constitution, that anyone who was enslaved was to be counted as three-fifths of a person.

The belief that underlies HB 3979—that schools exercise great power over students' moral development—has deep historical roots. For centuries it was widely accepted that the central goal of education was to save children's souls, and only incidentally to enlighten their minds. Whether the text of the lesson was the Torah, the Gospel According to Luke, or the Rigveda, educators were expected to shape their students' characters and, in so doing, bring them closer to God.

Upon the education of the people of this country the fate of this country depends.
—Benjamin Disraeli, 1874

It wasn't until the Enlightenment in France that the concept of a true liberal arts education, divorced from religious salvation, first emerged. As the journalist Dana Goldstein describes in her book *The Teacher Wars*, European educators in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries embraced the novel idea that education's rightful purpose was to impart secular knowledge: geography, science, languages, literature.

Leading American educators of the nineteenth century strongly disagreed with the secular liberal arts approach. Horace Mann, the Massachusetts reformer who did more than anyone to bring universal public education to the United States, criticized it as "the European fallacy" and declared that American children should be attending school primarily for the purpose of moral edification. "The teaching of A, B, C, and the multiplication table has no quality of sacredness in it," Mann explained in an 1839 lecture. Instead of focusing on the three Rs, public schools should direct students' attention "outward in goodwill toward men, and upward in reverence to God."

In the 1830s Mann and his fellow reformer Catharine Beecher launched a national campaign for universal public schools, to be paid for not by parents but by the state. At the time, families who wished their children to be educated chose ei-

ther expensive private academies or state schools that charged tuition through "rate bills." The common schools movement, as it became known, spread throughout New England and then across the country. Beecher's Hartford Female Seminary, in Connecticut, educated hundreds of young, devout, unmarried women to serve on the front lines of this rapid educational expansion (*Hartford, CT*, page 115). After minimal training, teachers were sent west to rural Iowa or Indiana or Illinois, where they lived in harsh, rugged conditions and taught in drafty one-room schoolhouses. Pay was low and life was hard, but Beecher's disciples were determined to bring a civilizing morality to the lawless West, to educate those whom Beecher called the "ignorant and neglected American children" of the frontier.

The problem is, moral instruction can be really boring. When a student was lucky enough to find an inventive, charismatic teacher like Abe Ravelstein (*Chicago*, page 160), Marcus Cornelius Fronto (*Rome*, page 167), or Miss Jean Brodie (*Edinburgh*, page 123), school could be a delight, even when the curriculum was dominated by repetitive drills and rote memorization. For many students, though, daily lessons were torture.

Toward the end of his life, the Austrian novelist Stefan Zweig looked back on his childhood in turn-of-the-century Vienna with a visceral distaste for his classroom experience (*Vienna*, page 117). "This dislike of school was not just my personal attitude," he wrote. "I can't remember one of my school friends who did not hate the way in which our best interests and intentions were inhibited, bored, and suppressed on the scholastic treadmill." Within the stultifying pedagogy of the day, Zweig perceived a political message, one that promoted conformity to authority of all kinds: "We were to be brought up to respect the status quo as perfect, our teachers' opinions as infallible, a father's word as final, brooking no contradiction, and state institutions as absolute and valid for all eternity."

> *What was the duty of the teacher if not to inspire?*
>
> *—Bharati Mukherjee, 1988*

As you'll see throughout this issue, Zweig was not alone in connecting the pedagogical strictures of the classroom with the political structure of the state. In reaction to complaints like Zweig's, the dawn of the twentieth century brought about a new kind of educational reform movement, one rooted in a critique of the authoritarian classroom. Maria Montessori, the Italian educator and physician, wrote (*Rome*, page 86) that traditional schools of the era were pervaded by "the principle of slavery," right down to the construction of the desks and chairs into which students were forced to wedge themselves. The goal of most schools, Montessori believed, was to oppress children's spirits—and that began with oppressing their bodies.

At her Casa dei Bambini in Rome, Montessori developed a method of education rooted in a new understanding of children's cognitive and psychological development. Children were natural learners, she believed, constitutionally inclined toward discovery and inquiry. She agreed with Plutarch that "the mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be kindled" and argued that schools could best stoke students' fire by allowing them the freedom to experiment, play, and learn on their own.

In Barcelona in 1901, a few years before Montessori created her Casa dei Bambini, the Spanish anarchist Francisco Ferrer opened his Escuela Moderna, the first

incarnation of what later became known as the rationalist schools movement. Like Montessori, Ferrer was critical of traditional methods that emphasized repetition and memorization over scientific inquiry and independent thinking. As he wrote in his rationalist manifesto (*Paris*, page 55), "A few yards from the threshold of the school, the grass is springing, the flowers are blooming; insects hum against the classroom windowpanes; but the pupils are studying natural history out of books!" The indignity of that contradiction has offended icons of American childhood from Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer to Charles Schulz's Peppermint Patty. Ferrer, though, was the first person to organize a school in response. The "essential function" of the Escuela Moderna, he wrote, was not to convey virtue or even knowledge; it was to "inculcate in the child an enthusiastic love of life and of humanity."

Ferrer's school had no exams, no system of reward and punishment, no set schedule. Students went to museums to learn about art, to factories to learn about mechanics, to cliff formations to study geology. Ferrer believed that intellectual liberation would bring about political liberation—that if students were freed from drudgery in the classroom, their minds would open up to the radical politics he favored. His hope was to "awaken in the children the desire for a society of men truly free and truly equal, equal economically as well as politically, and hence of real solidarity; a society without violence, without hierarchies, and without privilege of any sort."

In 1906, after a colleague of Ferrer's attempted to assassinate the Spanish king, the authorities closed the Escuela Moderna and briefly imprisoned Ferrer. After his release, he set off on a tour of Europe, where he promoted rationalist education and wrote the manifesto that appears in this issue. In 1909, after returning to Barcelona, Ferrer was arrested again on charges of sedition and, after a hasty military trial,

Children Playing on Large Iron Anchor, by Hokusai, nineteenth century.



was executed by firing squad. The Spanish authorities believed that the Escuela Moderna was a front for Ferrer's revolutionary ideas, and in a way they were right. The rationalist education movement continued to spread after his execution, with schools opening across Europe, in the United States, and as far afield as Japan.

Ferrer's intention was to change the world by changing the classroom. The connection he drew between pedagogy and politics is precisely the idea that motivated Texas House Bill 3979: The way students are treated in school will shape their future political leanings. Not just *what* they are taught, that is, but *how*.

Throughout history, that equation has been particularly fraught in schools and classrooms where students are part of a racial, ethnic, or cultural minority group and the instructors and administrators represent the dominant majority. You can see that tension throughout this issue, from Cesar Chavez's memories of Laguna Dam School (*Yuma, AZ*, page 69) to Nikora Atama's testimony of his days as a Maori student in a public school on the North Island of New Zealand (*Pawarenga*, page 141). Such stories share certain common elements: alienation, ambition, punishment, humiliation, and the enforced speaking of English. Chavez remembered "the ruler whistling through the air" whenever he and his fellow students spoke Spanish.

> *If education is segregated, it certainly can't be higher!*
>
> *—Godfrey Huggins, 1955*

The racial dynamics in American schools can be oppressive, even when everyone speaks the same language. Audre Lorde's Catholic school in 1930s Harlem (page 176) was organized like many at the time: an entirely African American student body instructed by an entirely white teaching staff. When I was reporting on charter schools in Harlem seventy years later, some of the classrooms I visited were not much different. Again, most of the teachers were white; most of the students were Black. There were no more dunce caps—like the one Lorde was forced to wear by her first-grade teacher, a young white nun named Sister Mary of Perpetual Help—but there were still endless rules, strictly enforced, that regulated when students could speak, how they should sit, and how they were required to walk through the halls (silently, following straight lines marked on the floor with masking tape). History has its echoes, in Harlem and elsewhere.

At various moments in American history, Black writers and activists have concluded that being instructed by white teachers in white-run institutions is essentially an untenable situation. "What the Negro needs, therefore, of the world and civilization, he must largely teach himself," W.E.B. Du Bois wrote in 1910 (*Atlanta*, page 49), calling for a "college-bred community" of Black Americans. Almost sixty years later, Black students at the University of California, Berkeley, reached a similar conclusion, demanding that the university create a Black studies program to ease their racial isolation (*Berkeley, CA*, page 144). "We can no longer prostitute our minds to the vain and irrelevant intellectual pursuits of Western society while our community lies in ruin," the students' proposal declared. "This would amount to intellectual shuffling, and we are determined to shuffle no more." At the time, Black students made up a tiny minority on Berkeley's campus; an official survey found that "American Negroes" made up only 1 percent of the student population in 1966. Fifty-six years later, that figure has barely budged. Black students now make up 2 percent of Berkeley's undergraduate population. History not only echoes; it sometimes repeats.

As these debates about identity and representation in American education were raging throughout the twentieth century, a second major shift was taking place. The central belief of Horace Mann and Catharine Beecher—that the point of education was to purify young souls—gradually gave way to a more utilitarian calculation that schools, first and foremost, were places to gain the skills that were valued in an increasingly competitive labor market. By 1972, when Gallup asked American parents why they wanted their children to be educated, the most frequent response was "to get better jobs"; "to make more money" was the third.

This shift began early in the twentieth century, at a moment of great turmoil for American workers. Agriculture still employed about a third of all working Americans, but that fraction was shrinking quickly, while the service sector was rapidly expanding. Technological innovation was transforming every job, from farming to bookkeeping. Manufacturing was becoming increasingly automated, which meant that employers needed workers who could perform basic calculations and read blueprints and instruction manuals. Offices were introducing new technologies as well, including typewriters and adding machines, all of which required significant cognitive skill to master. At the close of the nineteenth century, the typical American worker had only a sixth-grade education, and for most jobs, that was enough; for the jobs of the new century, however, it quickly became clear that more schooling would be required.

> *Ignorance is more costly to the state than education.*
>
> *—Booker T. Washington, 1899*

That dawning understanding led to the rapid expansion of public education in the first four decades of the twentieth century in what is known as the high school movement. Unlike the common schools movement of the nineteenth century, which was the top-down brainchild of dedicated reformers, the high school movement was a decentralized, grassroots undertaking. In small towns and big cities across the country, neighbors came together to build and operate free public high schools, voluntarily taxing themselves to do so. In contrast to the era of Beecher and Mann, these communities were motivated not by religious altruism but by enlightened self-interest. Without a well-educated workforce, citizens concluded, the new engines of progress might bypass their towns and leave their families behind.

The high school movement transformed education throughout the country. In 1910 only 9 percent of young Americans were graduating from high school; by 1940 more than half of them were. Within a generation, the United States had become the best-educated country in the world, and that educational advantage helped produce the nation's global economic advantage, which persisted for the rest of the century.

In the United States, the educational acceleration of the first half of the twentieth century gave rise to a debate that dominated the century's second half. As the economic return to skills (and thus to education) increased, the central question was no longer *What do we teach?* or even *How do we teach?* It was *Whom do we teach?* Who deserved what kind and quality of education, and who got to decide?

Like so many of our contemporary educational debates, this one has historical echoes, many of which resound through the pages of this issue. In revolutionary

Paris, Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord (*Paris*, page 30) proposed principles of universal education that were truly radical for the time—and arguably still are today. "Education must exist for all," he wrote. "Because it is one of the results, as well as one of the advantages, of a society, we must conclude that it is a common good; no one can therefore legitimately be excluded. In fact, the man who has the least private property seems to have an additional right to participate in this common property."

Despite these high-flown principles, France—and every other country—fell short of this democratic ideal for centuries. This was true not just in the West. In late nineteenth-century India, the social reformer Jotirao Phule described (*Pune*, page 107) how the country's education system had been warped by its caste structure, producing what he called the "pernicious system of high-class education."

In the United States, the question of who deserves what kind of education quickly became entangled with the essential American issue of race. Even after the Supreme Court's 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, it was apparent that many white Americans had no interest in extending anything like educational equality to the country's Black citizens. In the 1980s and 1990s social scientists, using improved methods of collecting and analyzing educational data, were able for the first time to quantify the large, widespread, and persistent gaps between the educational attainment of students from advantaged and disadvantaged racial and economic backgrounds. At the beginning of this century, the No Child Left Behind Act, signed by President George W. Bush, promised to make those gaps disappear, but it soon became apparent that the law provided no plans or mechanisms to do so beyond an almost religious faith in standardized tests and a generous helping of magical thinking.

Let us pick up our books and our pens. They are our most powerful weapons.
—Malala Yousafzai, 2013

This was the era during which I started reporting on education, mostly in neighborhoods where money was short and educational success was rare. If the slow failure of No Child Left Behind was hard on the ambitious and idealistic reformers who had seen it as a vehicle for a disruptive transformation of the American education system, it was much harder on the students in the schools where I was reporting. They knew as well as any Harvard economist that a first-rate education represented their best (or perhaps only) escape route from a punishing cycle of dead-end jobs and blighted neighborhoods. But they also knew that finding a first-rate education where they lived was almost impossible.

It was that *almost* that hurt the most. In every neighborhood there were exceptions, a fortunate few who were able to leverage rare talents or lucky breaks to transcend childhoods of hardship and poverty and achieve educational success. The exceptions allowed those of us in more privileged settings to imagine that the game was not rigged—that opportunity really did exist in every zip code, for those willing to grab it—and enabled us to gratefully transfer responsibility for solving the problem of educational inequality from our shoulders and back onto the students'.

For those who did manage to escape deprived childhoods and enter the promised land of elite higher education, the prize was often bittersweet. Sudden

immersion in extreme privilege can be as disorienting as sudden immiseration. When Elena Greco, Elena Ferrante's narrator in *The Story of a New Name* (*Pisa*, page 146), describes the well-connected young students she encountered when she went to Pisa for university, her story sounds almost exactly like those I heard from the first-generation college students I interviewed at highly selective American universities. Like Elena, the students I spoke to had usually arrived on campus believing that their prodigious academic ability would put them on an even footing with their wealthier classmates, only to find that what they had learned in books and in the classroom was not what really counted.

"They knew how a newspaper or a journal was put together," Ferrante writes of her more privileged peers, "how a publishing house was organized, what a radio or television office was, how a film originates, what the university hierarchies were, what there was beyond the borders of our towns or cities, beyond the Alps, beyond the sea…I, on the other hand, knew nothing…So I moved among them fearful of saying and doing the wrong things."

In my most recent book, I wrote about the American system of higher education and its persistent inequities—which is perhaps why the reading in this issue that caught and held my attention most deeply was from a 2021 essay by Agnes Callard, a philosophy professor at the University of Chicago (page 23). Callard acknowledges that universities "do perpetuate a governing elite," that legacies are favored in admissions, that the nation's college system as a whole promotes inequality…and then concludes that on some basic level, none of that matters. In a course she taught recently on Aristotle's scientific system, she could see that something magical was happening between her and her students, and she wrote her essay in an attempt to express that magic to the world outside: "I wanted to break down the walls around my classroom, throw a spotlight on it, and tell everyone to stop talking, look, and listen: 'It is happening right here—*this* is what universities are for: reading Aristotle together.' All the arguments about elitism and corporatization and donations were as irrelevant as the ivy growing on the walls."

The great difficulty in education is to get experience out of ideas.
—George Santayana, 1905

Callard's description of her classroom in Chicago reminded me of a similar one I visited at Princeton while I was reporting my book. I was invited there by a student I was profiling, a young woman named KiKi Gilbert, whom I had met when she was a senior at a large public high school in Charlotte, North Carolina. KiKi's childhood had been defined by long periods of instability punctuated by brief episodes of calamity, and she survived it by focusing relentlessly on her escape path, which she had decided, at an early age, would involve a degree from a prestigious college. When she was admitted to Princeton, she became one of those exceptional few who transcend early poverty and disadvantage and reach the apex of American higher education. She loved philosophy, and in her freshman year she was selected for Princeton's Humanities Sequence, a notoriously rigorous yearlong course in which small groups of students gather to discuss classic works of literature and philosophy.

The room where KiKi's class met was like a clubhouse for the educational elite—brass chandeliers, a working fireplace, an upright piano—and for almost everyone gathered around the mahogany table on the day I visited, it appeared



The Mechanical Age, by Fujita Tsuguharu, c. 1958.

to feel like home. They were having an experience much like the one Callard describes: discussing great books with like-minded aspiring intellectuals, free from distracting thoughts of class or money. For them, philosophy class did indeed seem pretty magical.

KiKi, though, was having a very different experience, as she later described it to me. Like Elena Greco in Pisa, she was unable to leave the outside world entirely outside. Even as she jousted with her classmates about the essays of Cicero and the plays of Plautus, she was always conscious of the structural inequities on which the magic in that seminar room depended. To KiKi, arguments about elitism or equity were not irrelevant to a discussion of ancient texts in a seminar room at Princeton; those arguments were, in fact, glaring and unavoidable. This meant that for her, the afternoon's class was perhaps less comfortable, and less intoxicating, than it was for her peers. But it also meant, I think, that she was the only student to grasp some of the most important lessons that were on offer in the seminar room that day: how intellectual ability is evaluated, how elite status is conveyed, why class advantages tend to persist from one generation to the next.

Education is always a political act, but its politics can be complex and tangled, and they are often hidden from view. Sometimes it takes an outsider's perspective to expose the political meanings embedded in the everyday workings of our educational institutions. Sometimes, though, we just need to try a little harder to see them for ourselves.

郵便報知新聞 第四百四十□号

亜三強きハ善に強く毒在楽下て勝と敗の譬ひあるに佃島懲役場ニ使役する罪人何某の旨きが中に三木豊吉といへる者あるを聞きて去る年沖にかきま上總小舟を島中ニ拾ふうしが維新の御代の恩沢なり罪人といへども讀書学問を教へあつて其者ありけれバ懲役の隙あり学を励しみ身の行ひを慎しまるれバ終に賞誉をたまハりて囚役を教へ導くの教官の端ニ加へられしとぞ

雑報 松林伯圓誌



MORNING BELL

2021: Chicago

AGNES CALLARD HOPES FOR THE BEST

In 2019 fifty or so parents were found to have bribed administrators and coaches to have their children accepted to colleges around the country. This college-admissions scandal—"Operation Varsity Blues," as it was known—got drawn out over several news cycles. That a bunch of people broke the law was not, in fact, the *real scandal*, as several pundits made sure to stress. Their crimes were only the tip of the iceberg; the real, true scandal was so enigmatic, so elusive, so deeply buried, that even after weeks in the press, commentators still felt called upon to dig some more.

So what was the real scandal? It was the problem of legal donations, and the fact that they are tax-exempt. SAT prep classes. The fact that universities perpetuate a governing elite. The fact that universities fail to perpetuate a governing elite. Grade inflation. College sports. Rich parents spoiling their children. Celebrity parents using universities to "launder" economic status into social status. The corporatization of the university. The creeping credentialization of U.S. society. The racism our universities fail to fight. The economic inequality our universities fail to fight. The fact that universities are not meritocratic. The fact that universities *are* meritocratic.

Now I grant that the university is easy to misinterpret, because its innermost parts are hidden from view. What's visible is who gets in and who is excluded; the fates of its graduates; clashes between townies and gownies; five-year completion rates; public-relations catastrophes; IRS 990 forms. If you go on a campus visit, you see the buildings, but not what happens inside them.

If you tried to understand museums by sitting outside and studying the demographics of who enters and exits, you might conclude that they existed to perpetuate the elite, and that they should work to achieve more social justice. Perhaps they do in fact do too much of the first thing, and should do more of the second. Nonetheless, your research would be missing

Miki Toyokichi Educating Himself and Fellow Prisoners, by Tsukioka Yoshitoshi, 1875.

1159: Canterbury

EAT PRAY LOVE

Although the art of logic has manifold utility, still, if one is learned only in it and ignorant of nothing else, he is actually retarded rather than helped to progress in philosophy, since he becomes a victim of verbosity and overconfidence. By itself logic is practically useless. Only when it is associated with other studies does logic shine, and then by a virtue that is communicated by them. Considerable indulgence should, however, be shown to the young, in whom verbosity should be temporarily tolerated, so that they may thus acquire an abundance of eloquence. The minds of the immature, like their growing bodies, must first be well fed, lest they become emaciated. Thus, by means of plenty of nourishing food, they can put on weight and acquire strength. During this stage, the flesh is allowed to luxuriate to a degree that might otherwise be considered excessive. At a later age, the surplus fat of the young will be sufficiently burned out and purified by the exertion of labor, the burden of responsibility, and the strain of work. As students mature and grow in understanding, our tolerance of unrestrained verbosity should diminish, and the impudence of sophistry (which Aristotle calls "contentious" but we refer to as "deceitful" or "caviling") should be suppressed. It is the duty of those who have the title and function of teachers to see to this. However, rules alone are useless. Theoretical principles must be consolidated by practice and assiduous exercise, except perhaps where a disposition has already been transformed into a habit.

John of Salisbury, *from the* Metalogicon. *Most likely educated at Salisbury and Exeter, John traveled to Paris in 1136 to study at the university in Mont-Sainte-Geneviève, where the scholastic philosopher Peter Abelard had recently set up a school. After finishing his studies, he worked as an administrator and secretary for the archbishop of Canterbury, composing his letters, offering legal counsel, and acting as an ambassador throughout Europe. In 1163 he was exiled by Henry II for advocating for the Church's autonomy from the crown.*

something very important about what museums are for, something that requires entering the museum and looking at the art.

That doesn't really get the pundits off the hook, because they tend to be college educated. The real scandal, if I may, is the fact that so many people who attended one seem to have no idea what it's for. So let me come out and tell you what a university is for: A university is a place where people help each other access the highest intellectual goods. A university is a place of *heterodidacticism*.

An autodidact is someone who learns best on their own, by teaching themselves things. *Heterodidact* is a word I made up to describe the rest of us, for whom learning and knowing is a social activity.

While the college-admissions scandal was happening, I was teaching a class on Aristotle's scientific system. What a crazy thing to teach or study, you might think. Hasn't it all been surpassed by modern science? No. But even if it had been, it is truly amazing to witness the birth of scientific thought. Aristotle was the first to conceive that the changing, sensible, empirical world around us could be rationally systematized, and he did this in opposition to a tradition—beginning with Parmenides and culminating in Plato—that insisted such a project was in principle incoherent. Aristotle proved that science was possible. His works—*Physics*, *Parts of Animals*, *On the Soul*, *On Generation and Corruption*, etc.—taken together, constitute the most ambitious intellectual project a human being has ever undertaken. And he succeeded to an astonishing degree—his most radical moves against his contemporary interlocutors are the ones we've most tenaciously internalized.

I'm going to make a confession about that class: I did not know the material I was teaching very well. Aristotle's natural philosophy is not my specialization, and I intentionally chose readings I was least comfortable with. Minutes before I walked into the classroom each Tuesday or Thursday afternoon, I had been buried in commentaries and confusion. There was so much I did not understand about Aristotle's arguments against atomism! But time was up, and I had to get in there and say something. If you were in that class, you probably thought what I said sounded pretty good, pretty coherent. Actually, it was. But that wasn't all me. I was looking at the students' faces, noticing how

they paid attention when I was making sense, noticing when they didn't follow. Their interest drew me out. I listened to their questions and reframed the argument on the spot; sometimes an objection was so devastating I had to reorganize a whole lecture on the fly. Sometimes, when I just plain didn't know the answer, I asked the question back at the class.

Teaching involves a sleight of hand in which the part of the student is erased, and the teacher ends up getting all the credit. Actually that's a point from Book 3 of Aristotle's *Physics*: he says the teacher isn't teaching if the student isn't learning, because teaching and learning are one activity.

Now don't go thinking this was some kind of subpar, slapdash course. This was one of the best classes I've ever taught. Good courses have all the messiness of human cooperation baked into them. That's what I wish I could've communicated to those embroiled in the admissions-scandal brouhaha; I wanted to break down the walls around my classroom, throw a spotlight on it, and tell everyone to stop talking, look, and listen: "It is happening right here—*this* is what universities are for: reading Aristotle together." All the arguments about elitism and corporatization and donations were as irrelevant as the ivy growing on the walls.

I could give you a hundred more examples, but I'll restrict myself to one. The previous quarter, I taught a class on courage, and we read Homer's *Iliad*. I think the *Iliad* is one of the greatest things ever made by human beings, but I hadn't read it in at least seven years. Why not? What was stopping me from picking it up? For that matter, why am I not reading it right now? The answer is that it's hard to read the *Iliad*. Have you ever tried? It takes so much energy. All

Teacher with students, Jordan, c. 1976. Photograph by Nathan Benn.





Red School House (Country Scene), by George Henry Durrie, 1858.

those epithets. So many tendons being unstrung by spearpoints. I am not some special kind of human who just sits around reading the *Iliad* for fun. I'm not that different from the students I teach. They get their energy from me, I get my energy from them. That's how a university works.

And it's totally amazing that human beings can do this, that we can form intellectual communities. If we didn't actually see it happening, human beings collaborating with nothing to bind them to one another but a shared intellectual interest, we would doubt such a thing was possible. These communities are far from perfect, a fact they inherit from the creatures who compose them. But they are wonderful.

In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates constructs an ideal city and lays out the details of an educational program for its rulers—who will later be known as "philosopher-kings"—and proposes that its citizens be told a lie. The lie is that the education that the rulers received was a dream, and that these rulers are equipped to rule because they have gold mixed into their souls. (The other, lesser citizens have silver or bronze mixed into their souls.)

Notice two things about Plato's noble lie: First, the reader is explicitly told that it is not the truth. Plato does not hide this information "between the lines." Second, its political function is to naturalize culture, which is to say, to make it appear as though differences caused by education were inscribed in people from the outset in the form of innate capacities whose existence underlies outer differences in social class.

I believe that Plato's phrase *noble lie* is an attempt to describe something we might nowadays call "the ideology of the elite"—the story that elite people tell themselves, and one

another, in order to justify their elevated social position. In Plato's case, the privileges that get justified in this way are not wealth (the rulers in his city are kept poor, and even prevented from owning property) nor ruling (which Plato sees as a burden and a chore), but the gift of education itself, and that of the philosophical life that, we will later learn, the rulers will get to spend most of their lives living.

If Plato did not subscribe to the idea that only a select few have a talent for philosophy, does it follow that he thought everyone had it? Far from it. For one thing, he sets up elaborate contests and competitions to see whether the recipients of his educational program have in fact learned what they were taught. This suggests an acknowledgment of noneducational factors in the outcome. What Plato denies (or rather, what he uses the myth to deceptively assert) is that these factors play the role of *talents* or *innate human potential*.

Consider: If the only cuneiform class is at seven AM, someone who is a "morning person" will be more likely to learn cuneiform. If we assume being a morning person is a biologically innate property, it would follow that in this scenario people are not naturally equal in respect of where they will end up, cuneiformwise. But that doesn't mean that being a morning person constitutes a talent for cuneiform or an innate potential to excel at cuneiform. Now imagine that most intellectual differences interface with the accidents of environment in just this brute, contingent way. No one would "deserve" their intellectual opportunities, any more than being a morning person entitles you to learning cuneiform.

The fact that the education program laid out in the *Republic* eventually turns out to involve over fifty years of trials and tests is an acknowledgment of how little knowledge Plato thought we could presume, *even in a utopia*, as to how to "make someone a philosopher." In the real world, Plato's view seemed to be that philosophers arise because occasionally a human being—for no reason, following no plan, and certainly not because he was secretly marked out as One of the Special Ones from birth—manages by sheer luck to find his way to the lone worthwhile life. Thus Socrates' shortcomings with respect to the intellectual "talents" most valued in his era—memory and rhetorical cleverness—are often thematized by Plato. There are strange people who somehow, through a series of accidents, get and stay keyed to intellectual goods on their own—the autodidacts I mentioned earlier—but the rest of us need constant help reorienting, because just about every worldly temptation pulls us in the opposite direction.

> *What one knows is, in youth, of little moment;*
> *they know enough who know how to learn.*
> *—Henry Adams, 1907*

This, in the end, is the explanation of why the innermost parts of the university are hidden from view—and not only to outsiders. I rely on my students and colleagues—including my dead colleagues, such as Aristotle and Plato—to redirect me when I lose my way. If I had left the university after college, I believe the intellectual life I occasionally glimpsed as an undergraduate would have faded into a nostalgic memory.

There's nothing in your DNA that makes you a philosopher, nor is there some regimen you can run through to transform yourself into one. The closest we have come to devising a system for attuning a person to the intellectual life is to surround her with others aiming at the same thing for as long as the relevant parties can continue to afford it and hope for the best.

From "The Real College Scandal," which was published in The Point. *When she was a child, Callard and her family left Hungary for the United States with the help of a Jewish aid organization. She credits her decision to pursue her undergraduate studies at the University of Chicago, where she is now an associate professor of philosophy, to a letter she received from humanities lecturer Amy Kass critiquing her admissions essay. "She had this gift," Callard told an interviewer, "of asking questions and then looking at you in such a way as to make it seem that the weight of the world lay on your answer."*

1924: Torquay

BECOMING

How are the basic principles of education determined these days? The child is observed, and then you are told the child is like this or like that and must learn something. Then it is thought how best to teach so that the child can learn such and such a thing quickly. But what in reality is a child? A child remains a child for at most twelve years, or possibly longer, but that is not the point. The point is that a child must always be thought of as becoming a grown-up person someday. Life as a whole is a unity, and you must not consider only the child but the whole of life; you must look at the whole human being.

> *Go to the pine if you want to learn about the pine, or to the bamboo if you want to learn about the bamboo.*
>
> *—Matsuo Basho, c. 1685*

Suppose I have a pale child in the school. A pale child should be an enigma to me, a riddle to be solved. There may be several reasons for the pallor, but the following is a possible one. The child may have come to school with somewhat rosy cheeks, and my treatment of the child may have caused the pallor. I must admit this and be able to judge the causes of the change of color; I may perhaps come to see that I have given this child too much to learn by heart. The memory may have been worked too hard. If I do not admit this possibility, if I am a shortsighted teacher with the idea that a method must be carried through regardless of whether the child grows rosy or pale thereby, that the method must be preserved at any cost, then the child will remain pale.

If, however, I observed this same child at the age of fifty, I would probably find terrible sclerosis or arterial hardening, the cause of which would be unknown. This is the result of my having overloaded the child's memory at the age of eight or nine. For you see, the adult of fifty and the child of eight or nine belong together; they are one and the same human being. I must know what the result will be, forty or fifty years later, of my management of the child; for life is a unity, it is all connected. It is not enough merely to know the child; I must know the whole human being.

Again, I take great trouble to give a class the best definitions I can, so that the concepts can be firmly grasped and the children will know: this is a lion, that is a cat, and so on. But should children retain these concepts to the day of their death? In our present age, there is no feeling for the fact that the soul, too, must grow! If I furnish a child with a concept that is to remain "correct" (and "correctness" is, of course, all that matters), a concept to be retained throughout life, it is just as though I bought the child a pair of shoes at the age of three and each successive year had shoes made of the same size. The child will grow out of them. This, however, is something that people notice, and it would be considered brutal to try and keep the child's feet small enough to go on wearing the same-sized shoes! Yet this is what is being done with the soul when I furnish the child with ideas that do not grow with the person. I am constantly squeezing the soul into the ideas I give the child.

These are some of the ways in which you may begin to answer the challenge that in education you must take the whole human being into consideration—the growing, living human being, and not just an abstract idea.

It is only when you have the right conception of human life as a connected whole that you come to realize how different from one another the various ages are. Children before the first teeth are shed are very different beings from what they become afterward. Of course, you must not interpret this in crudely formed judgments, but if you are capable of making finer distinctions in life, you can observe that children are quite different before and after the change of teeth.

Before the change of teeth, you can still see quite clearly at work the effects of the child's habits of life before birth or conception, in its pre-earthly existence in the spiritual world. The body of the child acts almost as though it were



A School for Boys and Girls, by Jan Steen, c. 1670.

spirit, for the spirit that has descended from the spiritual world is still fully active in a child in the first seven years of life. You will say: A fine sort of spirit! It has become quite boisterous, for the child is rampageous, awkward, and incompetent. Is all this to be attributed to the spirit belonging to its pre-earthly life? Well, my dear friends, suppose all you clever and well-brought-up people were suddenly condemned to remain always in a room having a temperature of 144 degrees Fahrenheit? You couldn't do it! It is even harder for the spirit of the child, which has descended from the spiritual worlds, to accustom itself to earthly conditions. The spirit, suddenly transported into a completely different world, with the new experience of having a body to carry about, acts as we see the child act. Yet if you know how to observe and note how each day, each week, each month, the indefinite features of the face become more definite, the awkward movements become less clumsy, and the child gradually accustoms itself to its surroundings, then you will realize that it is the spirit from the pre-earthly world that is working to make the child's body gradually more like itself. We shall understand why the child is as it is if we observe the child in this way, and we shall also understand it is the descended spirit that is acting as we see it within the child's body.

Rudolf Steiner, *from* The Kingdom of Childhood. *In 1918 Steiner was invited to establish a school for the children of workers at the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory in Stuttgart. He devised the Independent Waldorf School as the educational branch of his doctrine of anthroposophy, through which he hoped to combine spiritualism and the natural sciences. In 1924, a year before he died, Steiner gave a series of lectures on his educational philosophy; his notes include the dictums "Discipline dependent on the right mood of the soul" and "Seating of children according to temperament."*

1791: Paris

COMMON GOOD

Our public powers are now organized: freedom and equality exist under the all-powerful guard of the law; property has regained its true foundations; and yet the constitution would seem incomplete if we did not add, at last, public education. No doubt, we have the right to call this a power, since it encompasses a distinct order of functions that relentlessly improves the body politic and our general prosperity.

I will not seek here to point out the inanity or the innumerable defects of what has up to now been called "education." Under the old order of things, we could not stop to think on the barbarity of our institutions without becoming frightened of the total lack of enlightenment in the great majority of men, then revolted by the deplorable opinions driven into the minds of those not devoted entirely to ignorance and the prejudices of all kinds on which they were nourished, and the discordance, or rather the absolute opposition, that existed between what a child was compelled to learn and what a man was compelled to do, and finally, the blind and persistent deference to practices that have long been obsolete, which still seemed, after more than ten centuries, to require all of our citizens to live in monasteries.

However, these shocking contradictions, and even greater ones, should not come as a surprise. They naturally had to exist where constitutionally everything was out of place, where so many interests united to deceive and degrade the human species, where it was the nature of government to reject any principles that did not flatter its errors, where it seemed necessary to teach men from childhood to come to terms with prejudices they would live and die under. Men are declared free; but don't we know that education constantly enlarges the sphere of civil liberty and alone can maintain political liberty against all kinds of despotism? Don't we know that even under the freest constitution, the ignorant man is at the mercy of the charlatan and much too dependent on the educated man? The one who cannot read or count depends on everything that surrounds him; he who knows the first elements of arithmetic would not depend on the genius of Newton and could even profit from his discoveries.

Training for the German Democratic Republic's National People's Army, East Germany, 1976.



Men are recognized as equal, and yet how little would this equality of rights be felt, how little made real, in the midst of so many de facto inequalities, if education did not constantly strive to restore this standard and at least weaken the disastrous disparities that it cannot destroy!

Finally, to be honest, would the constitution really exist if it existed only in our code, if from there it did not throw its roots in the souls of all the citizens, if it never imprinted there new feelings, new manners, new habits? And is it not for the daily and ever-increasing action of education that these great changes are reserved?

Everything thus proclaims the urgent need to organize education. Everything shows us that the new state of things, raised on the ruins of so much abuse, requires a creation of this kind, and the rapid and almost spontaneous decline of the present establishments that in all parts of the kingdom wither like plants on a new land that rejects them clearly announces that the moment has come to undertake this great work.

Education is indeed a power of a special nature. It is not given to any man to measure its extent, and the national power itself cannot draw its limits. Men arrive on earth with various abilities, which are both the instruments of their well-being and the means of accomplishing the destiny to which society calls them. But these abilities, at first inactive, need time and activity and men to achieve their full development, to acquire all their energy. Each individual enters life with a profound ignorance of what he can and must someday be. It is up to education to show it to him.

Society should in effect be thought of as a vast workshop. It is not enough that everyone works there; everyone must be in their place, otherwise their powers will oppose each other, rather than increasing. The greatest of all economies is the economy of men, which consists of putting them in their proper positions. It is indisputable that a good system of education is the first means to achieve this. From this point of view, the following principles are called for:

(1) Education must exist for all. Because it is one of the results, as well as one of the advantages, of a society, we must conclude that it is a common good; no one can therefore legitimately be excluded. In fact, the man who has the least private property seems to have an additional right to participate in this common property.

(2) Education, as to its purpose, must be universal, for then it becomes truly a common good, in which each man can appropriate the part that suits him. The various branches of knowledge that education encompasses may not appear equally useful, but there are none that are truly useless and cannot become more useful, and which consequently should be rejected or neglected. There exists between these branches an eternal alliance, a reciprocal dependence; for they all have, in the reason of man, a common point of union, so that one is necessarily enriched and strengthened by the other. In a well-organized society, although no one can come to know everything, it must nevertheless be possible to learn everything.

> *Knowledge itself is power.*
>
> *—Francis Bacon, 1597*

(3) Education must exist for both sexes; this is too obvious. Since it is a common good, on what principle could one of the two be deprived of it?

(4) Finally, it must exist for all ages. It is a prejudice of habit to always imagine education as only the institution of youth. Education can preserve and improve those it has already trained; therefore, it should naturally be applied to all ages, if all ages are liable to it.

Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord, *from "Report on Public Instruction." A graduate of the Sorbonne, Talleyrand was named bishop of Autun shortly before the outbreak of the French Revolution. From that position he facilitated the nationalization of all church property, earning him the nickname "bishop of the Revolution." He later served in Napoleon's cabinet; one British cartoonist depicted their relationship with an illustration of Napoleon as the "butcher of Europe," waving a meat cleaver around a carcass-strewn barn while "Talley" attempts to restrain him.*

c. 1936: Suwa

GEISHA SCHOOL

Unable to go to school, unable to read, I had grown up as an abandoned dog does; and then at the age of twelve I was sold. Actually, I didn't know how old I was; but around that time I heard someone say that that child was twelve, and I recall thinking, "So I'm twelve years old then, am I?" Given that, it must have been about 1936 or 1937.

The place I was sold to was a geisha house in Upper Suwa called the Takenoya. At first I was wide-eyed with astonishment at its splendor, like a palace in a dream. Uncle was talking about something in a low voice with the master of the Takenoya, bowing his head lower than necessary and incessantly wiping the tip of his nose with his tightly clenched handkerchief. I crouched down behind him, making myself as small as I could. My face was burned black by the sun, but my eyes must have flashed with curiosity as they darted about the room.

> *What sculpture is to a block of marble, education is to a human soul.*
>
> *—Joseph Addison, 1711*

"Looks like a river sprite, this one."

The first words to reach my ears were those of "Mother," the mistress of the Takenoya. For some reason I felt embarrassed and hung my head low in shame. Before long the transaction must somehow have been settled. Uncle said, "From now on, you'll be a child of this house, so do as the master tells you, and make yourself liked." Then he left through the tradesman's entrance.

I was put in the bath, given a change of clothes, and taken to my Elder Sisters' room. I was utterly amazed. Kimonos and underrobes more beautiful even than those the daughter of the landowner had worn to festivals were hanging there on bamboo hangers. Once, when I was a nursemaid, I'd taken a peek at one of the daughter's picture books. There was a drawing of a beautiful palace in it, and I'd whispered to Mii-chan, the tenant farmer, "What's this?" "It's the Palace of the Dragon King," he told me, "and the pretty princess is Oto Hime." Now, really, it seemed as if I'd ended up in the Palace of the Dragon King, and so my Elder Sisters must be Oto Hime. How happy I'd be, I thought, if I, too, could live in such a beautiful place!

But the rigors that began the following day taught me that this was not the soft life I'd thought it would be, that this was no haven of refuge. Up in the morning, wipe down all the woodwork, wash the clothes of all nine people in the house, run errands; then in the evening, traipse after my Elder Sisters carrying their samisen; and when necessary—when they stayed over—fetch a change of clothes for them. Mother and my Sisters ordered me to do one chore after another; there wasn't a moment when I could have relaxed. And never a word with which they didn't hurl some sort of abuse. You fool! You idiot!

When I first arrived, Father had asked me what my name was, and I'd replied, without a moment's hesitation, "Nursie."

"There's no such name as Nursie." He laughed.

"It's Crane," I quickly corrected myself.

"Crane? That's better."

So it was "Crane" I was called, but then they all decided they'd call me "Low," as in "low intelligence."

Still, I was happier than I'd been before. After all, I could always get sweets. When my Elder Sisters were in a good mood, they'd hide in their sleeves the bonbons and sponge cake they were given at parties and bring them back for me. At the landowner's house, I'd seen sweets but had never been given any.

After I'd been here about a month, I was sent to geisha school. As a rule, novices didn't go to regular school; they went to the geisha school run by the geisha registry office. Even on our way to and fro, we'd be pestered by the local bullies if they spotted us.

"Hey! Here come the geisha kids! What a stink! What a stink!" they'd say, throwing stones at us, making faces, jeering.

At the geisha registry school, the samisen teacher was thin and strict and covered with freckles. In lessons we sat facing one another and learned by watching her every move. If you made two or three mistakes, suddenly her plectrum would fly down and hit you hard on the knee. As a novice there was never a time when I didn't have bruises on my knees. Nor was the plectrum of the samisen the only pain we had to endure: at dancing lessons the teacher's ruler would lash out and whack your hand, your leg, anywhere. I was surprised how much it hurt to be whacked with a ruler. Was this a kindness, meant to whip us into shape as quickly as possible? Or a punishment, because they despised us as things to be bought and sold? Yet if they were teaching a young lady of means, I was sure, they wouldn't treat her this way, even if she did make a mistake.

At the time, if there had been a kindly god or some such who had said to me, "I won't hurt you physically or mentally, I promise, so tell me the truth. What is it you're most afraid of?," I would have answered immediately, "People." And if that god had said, "I'll grant you just one wish," I'm sure I would have answered, "I want to go somewhere there are no people."

They also taught writing at the geisha school. But no one cared much whether or not you learned your letters. Figuring I'd reduce the pain, even by one whack if I could, I threw myself totally into learning samisen, drum, and dancing and made no attempt to learn my letters.

Masuda Sayo, *from* Autobiography of a Geisha. *Having spent much of her childhood working as a nursemaid on a farm near Shiojiri, in Nagano Prefecture, Masuda was sold to a geisha house by her impoverished parents when she was twelve years old. Four years later she made her debut as "a fully fledged geisha." "It wasn't a matter of liking it or disliking it," she writes of her initiation into sex work elsewhere in this memoir, which she began composing in 1956 for a women's nonfiction writing competition. "What can I say? This, too, sadly, becomes second nature to a geisha."*

Confucius and his disciples, China, early nineteenth century.



1917: Great Lakes

MEDICAL RESIDENCY

A long, long time ago, some Indians were running along a trail that led to an Indian settlement. As they ran, a rabbit jumped from the bushes and sat before them.

The Indians stopped, for the rabbit still sat up before them and did not move from the trail. They shot their arrows at him, but the arrows came back unstained with blood.

Make human nature your study wherever you reside—whatever the religion or the complexion, study their hearts.
—Ignatius Sancho, 1778

A second time they drew their arrows. Now no rabbit was to be seen. Instead an old man stood on the trail. He seemed to be weak and sick.

The old man asked them for food and a place to rest. They would not listen but went on to the settlement.

Slowly the old man followed them, down the trail to the wigwam village. In front of each wigwam, he saw a skin placed on a pole. This he knew was the sign of the clan to which the dwellers in that wigwam belonged.

First he stopped at a wigwam where a wolfskin hung. He asked to enter, but they would not let him. They said, "We want no sick men here."

On he went toward another wigwam. Here a turtle's shell was hanging. But this family would not let him in.

He tried a wigwam where he saw a beaver skin. He was told to move on.

The Indians who lived in a wigwam where a deerskin was seen were just as unkind. Nor was he permitted to enter wigwams where hung hawk, snipe, and heron skins.

At last he came to a wigwam where a bearskin hung.

"I will ask once more for a place to rest," he thought.

And here a kind old woman lived. She brought food for him to eat and spread soft skins for him to lie upon.

The old man thanked her. He said that he was very sick. He told the woman what plants to gather in the wood to make him well again.

This she did, and soon he was healed.

A few days later, the old man was again taken sick. Again he told the woman what roots and leaves to gather. She did as she was told, and soon he was well.

Many times the old man fell sick. Each time he had a different sickness. Each time he told the woman what plants and herbs to find to cure him. Each time she remembered what she had been told.

Soon this woman of the Bear clan knew more about healing than all the other people.

One day the old man told her that the Great Spirit had sent him to earth to teach the Indian people the secrets of healing.

"I came, sick and hungry, to many a wigwam door. No blanket was drawn aside for me to pass in. You alone lifted the blanket from your wigwam door and bade me enter. You are of the Bear clan, therefore all other clans shall come to the Bear clan for help in sickness. You shall teach all the clans what plants and roots and leaves to gather, that the sick may be healed. And the Bear shall be the greatest and strongest of the clans."

The Indian woman lifted her face to the Great Spirit to thank him for this great gift and knowledge of healing. When she turned again to the man, he had disappeared.

No one was there, but a rabbit was running swiftly down the trail.

Mabel Powers, *from* Stories the Iroquois Tell Their Children. *The daughter of a preacher, Powers was born in Hamburg, New York, in 1872; studied in Buffalo; and taught in Rochester. As a teenager she began writing newspaper and magazine articles about the Native American way of life. In 1910 she was invited to participate in a ceremony on the Tonawanda Seneca Indian Reservation and was formally adopted by the Snipe clan, who called her Yehsennohwehs, "she who carries and tells the stories." Soon thereafter she settled near the Chautauqua Institution, where she was a frequent speaker.*

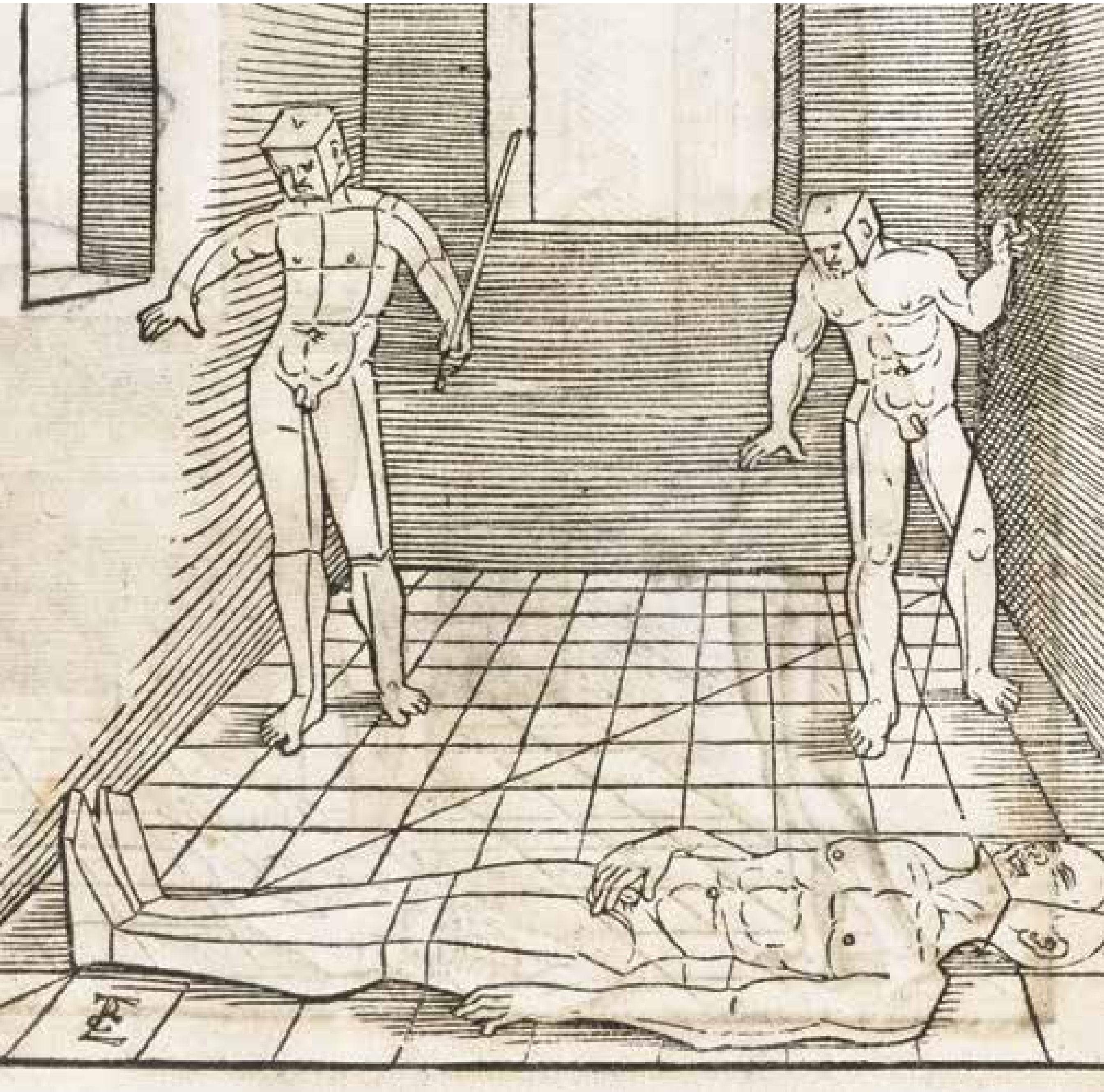
c. 1900: Berlin

SINGING LESSON

Tardy Arrival

The clock in the schoolyard wore an injured look because of my offense. It read "tardy." And in the hall, through the classroom doors I brushed by, murmurs of secret deliberations reached my ears. Teachers and students were friends behind those doors. Or else all was quite still, as though someone were expected. Quietly I took hold of the door handle. Sunshine flooded the spot where I stood. Then I defiled my pristine day by entering. No one seemed to know me or even to see me. Just as the devil takes the shadow of Peter Schlemihl, the teacher had taken my name at the beginning of the hour. I could no longer get my turn on the list. I worked noiselessly with the others until the bell sounded. But no blessedness crowned the toil.

Woodcut from *Instruction on the Proportion and Position of Jointed Mannequins*, by Erhard Schön, 1538.



Two Enigmas

Among the picture postcards in my collection, there were some whose written message is fixed more clearly in my memory than their illustration. They bear the beautiful clear signature *Helene Pufahl*. That was the name of my teacher. The *p* at the beginning was the *p* of perserverance, of punctuality, of prizewinning performance; *f* stood for faithful, fruitful, free of errors; and as for the *l* at the end, it was the figure of lamblike piety and love of learning. Had this signature comprised consonants alone, like some Semitic text, it would have been, as you see, not only the seat of calligraphic perfection but the root of all virtues.

The content of the curriculum should never exclude the realities of the very students who must intellectually wrestle with it. When students study all worlds except their own, they are miseducated.

—Johnnetta B. Cole, 1993

Boys and girls from the better families of the bourgeois West took part in Fräulein Pufahl's circle. In certain cases one was not too particular, so that into this domain of the bourgeoisie a little girl of the nobility also might stray. She was called Luise von Landau, and the name soon had me under its spell. Even today it has remained alive in my memory, though there is another reason for that. It was the first among those of my age group on which I heard fall the accent of death. This was after I had already outgrown our little circle and become a pupil in the middle school. When I now passed by the banks of the Lützow, I would always cast my eyes in the direction of her house. It lay, by chance, opposite a little garden that overhung the water on the other bank. And this garden plot I gradually wove together so intimately with the beloved name that I finally came to the conclusion that the flower bed on the riverbank, so resplendent and inviolable, was the cenotaph of the departed child.

Fräulein Pufahl was succeeded by Herr Knoche. I was then in grammar school. What went on in his classroom for the most part repelled me. Nevertheless, it is not in the course of one of his chastisements that my memory lights on Herr Knoche but rather in his capacity as a seer prophesying the future. It was during a singing lesson. We were practicing the cavalier's song from *Wallenstein*: "To horse then, comrades, to horse and away! / And into the field where freedom awaits us. / In the field of battle, man still has his worth, / And the heart is still weighed in the balance." Herr Knoche wanted the class to tell him what the meaning of the last line might be. Naturally, no one could do so. That seemed not unfitting to Herr Knoche, and he declared, "You will understand this when you are grown up."

In those days the shoreline of adult life appeared to me just as cut off from my own existence, by the river course of many years, as that bank of the canal on which the flower bed lay and on which, during walks overseen by my governess, I had never set foot. Later, when there was no one any longer to dictate my path, and when I, too, had come to understand the cavalier's song, I would sometimes pass quite close to the flower bed by the Landwehr Canal. But now it seemed to bloom less often. And no longer did it know the name that we had once together honored any more than that line from the cavalier's song, now that I understood it, contained the meaning that Herr Knoche had promised us in the singing lesson. The empty grave and the heart weighed in the balance—two enigmas to which life still owes me the solution.

Walter Benjamin, *from* Berlin Childhood Around 1900. *"Several times in my inner life," Benjamin wrote in 1938, after leaving his native Germany and living in Paris, "I deliberately called to mind those images that, in exile, are most apt to waken homesickness: images of childhood" to help him come to terms with the "irretrievability" of the past. Written between 1932 and 1938,* Berlin Childhood *remained mostly unpublished during Benjamin's lifetime; two years after his final revision of the manuscript, he died by suicide.*

c. 1595: Navarre

STAND TO REASON

[*Enter Ferdinand King of Navarre, Berowne, Longaville, and Dumaine.*]

Berowne: So much, dear liege, I have already sworn,
That is, to live and study here three years.
But there are other strict observances:
As not to see a woman in that term,
Which I hope well is not enrolled there;
And one day in a week to touch no food,
And but one meal on every day beside,
The which I hope is not enrolled there;
And then to sleep but three hours in the night,
And not be seen to wink of all the day
(When I was wont to think no harm all night
And make a dark night too of half the day),
Which I hope well is not enrolled there.
O, these are barren tasks, too hard to keep—
Not to see ladies, study, fast, not sleep.

King: Your oath is passed to pass away from these.

Berowne: Let me say no, my liege, an if you please.
I only swore to study with your grace
And stay here in your court for three years' space.

Longaville: You swore to that, Berowne, and to the rest.

Berowne: By yea and nay, sir, then I swore in jest.
What is the end of study, let me know?

King: Why, that to know which else we should not know.

Berowne: Things hid and barred, you mean, from common sense?

King: Ay, that is study's godlike recompense.

Berowne: Come on then, I will swear to study so,
To know the thing I am forbid to know,
As thus—to study where I well may dine
When I to feast expressly am forbid;
Or study where to meet some mistress fine
When mistresses from common sense are hid;
Or having sworn too hard-a-keeping oath,
Study to break it and not break my troth.
If study's gain be thus, and this be so,

Study knows that which yet it doth not know.
Swear me to this, and I will ne'er say no.

King: These be the stops that hinder study quite,
And train our intellects to vain delight.

Berowne: Why, all delights are vain, but that most vain
Which, with pain purchased, doth inherit pain:
As, painfully to pore upon a book,
To seek the light of truth, while truth the while
Doth falsely blind the eyesight of his look.
Light seeking light doth light of light beguile;
So, ere you find where light in darkness lies,
Your light grows dark by losing of your eyes.
Study me how to please the eye indeed,
By fixing it upon a fairer eye,
Who dazzling so, that eye shall be his heed,
And give him light that it was blinded by.
Study is like the heaven's glorious sun,
That will not be deep-searched with saucy looks:
Small have continual plodders ever won,
Save base authority from others' books.
These earthly godfathers of heaven's lights,
That give a name to every fixed star,
Have no more profit of their shining nights
Than those that walk and wot not what they are.
Too much to know is to know nought but fame;
And every godfather can give a name.

King: How well he's read to reason against reading!

Dumaine: Proceeded well, to stop all good proceeding!

Longaville: He weeds the corn, and still lets grow the weeding.

Berowne: The spring is near, when green geese are a-breeding.

Dumaine: How follows that?

Berowne: Fit in his place and time.

Dumaine: In reason nothing.

Berowne: Something then in rhyme.

King: Berowne is like an envious sneaping frost
That bites the first-born infants of the spring.

Berowne: Well, say I am; why should proud summer boast
Before the birds have any cause to sing?

Why should I joy in any abortive birth?
At Christmas I no more desire a rose
Than wish a snow in May's newfangled shows,
But like of each thing that in season grows.
So you, to study now it is too late,
Climb o'er the house to unlock the little gate.

King: Well, sit you out. Go home, Berowne. Adieu.

Berowne: No, my good lord, I have sworn to stay with you;
And though I have for barbarism spoke more
Than for that angel knowledge you can say,
Yet confident I'll keep what I have sworn,
And bide the penance of each three years' day.
Give me the paper, let me read the same,
And to the strict'st decrees I'll write my name.

King: How well this yielding rescues thee from shame!

William Shakespeare, *from* Love's Labor's Lost. *Composed around 1595 and performed for Elizabeth I at Christmas two years later, this comedy opens with the king of Navarre compelling three of his lords—Berowne, Longaville, and Dumaine—to pledge to study under him for three years, during which time they must remain celibate. "If we were to part with any of the author's comedies, it should be this," William Hazlitt wrote in 1817, more than two hundred years after the play had last been staged, "which we think savors more of the pedantic spirit of Shakespeare's time than of his own genius."*

Claude Bernard and His Pupils, by Léon-Augustin Lhermitte, 1889.



1909: Radchester

CLASS DIFFERENCES

September 20
It is very strange and frightening: all the boys seem to me to be grown men and I, a veritable minnow in a sea of Tritons, but I suppose really they are quite bovine and regard me much as cows regard human beings—as their natural master. I wonder! I confess I am in a panic about my ability to keep order. On several nights in the "vac," I had nightmares of classes of unruly boys refusing to obey me, shouting, throwing things about, and generally making nuisances of themselves and a fool of me.

> *A good education is not so much one which prepares a man to succeed in the world as one which enables him to sustain failure.*
> *—Bernard Iddings Bell, 1950*

My first impressions of Radchester are not very comforting. It is like coming to a desert island to be pitchforked out at a wayside station miles from anywhere, with only the sea to the east, and flat dike lands to the west, north, and south. There are no houses within sight. Certainly, there is nothing to distract one's attention from one's duty: outside the lodge gates, all is barren. The first thing for me to do is to furnish my rooms. Alas, where am I to procure the means to do this?

At present in my sitting room there is nothing but a frayed carpet, a few rickety chairs, a table, unstable on its legs, and an enormous bookcase and cupboard combined. My bedroom is ugly, bare, and damp, with no fireplace. Apparently, they encourage us to be spartan in our mode of living here. How different from the Oxford of three months ago.

There is something monastic about the life here: only one other master except the Chief is married; women are obviously not encouraged.

In chapel I saw the whole school for the first time. I was exceedingly nervous and imagined myself to be the cynosure of all eyes. I thought that they were all taking stock of me and sizing me up. I must remember to be strict from the very beginning. The start is everything.

September 27
I am gradually getting used to the routine. Certainly, the breaking of the ice was very trying. Luckily, I had prepared my lessons carefully before I went into form, so I had plenty to say, which prevented my extreme nervousness from being too apparent, and I punished two boys heavily for talking while I was trying to teach. On the whole, most of them appear to be tractable. What does amaze me is their abysmal ignorance.

For the first few days, I was talking over their heads the whole time. In mathematics I went too fast. In English I took it for granted that they knew something about the subject; I am gradually finding out that they know nothing. What is worse, only a very few of them want to know anything. They exhaust all their energies and keenness on games; they have none left for work. It is looked upon as a gross breach of good form to take anything but the most perfunctory interest in class. I find that I am falling into the most insidious of traps. I am picking out favorites. There are two boys, Benbow and Illingworth, both in my English set, who have shown up essays quite outside the common: they care about things; they read; they express a novel point of view; they are rebels against tradition. I have given them the run of my rooms and implored them to borrow what books they like from my shelves and to come to tea whenever they like.

A week of this life has taught me quite a number of useful things:

(1) That it is quite easy to keep order. A number of men here get persistently "ragged," but that seems to me to be due to their lack of humor, their uncertain temper, and their misunderstanding of the boy mind.

(2) I hate having to correct work at night. It is merely a mechanical drudgery and does the

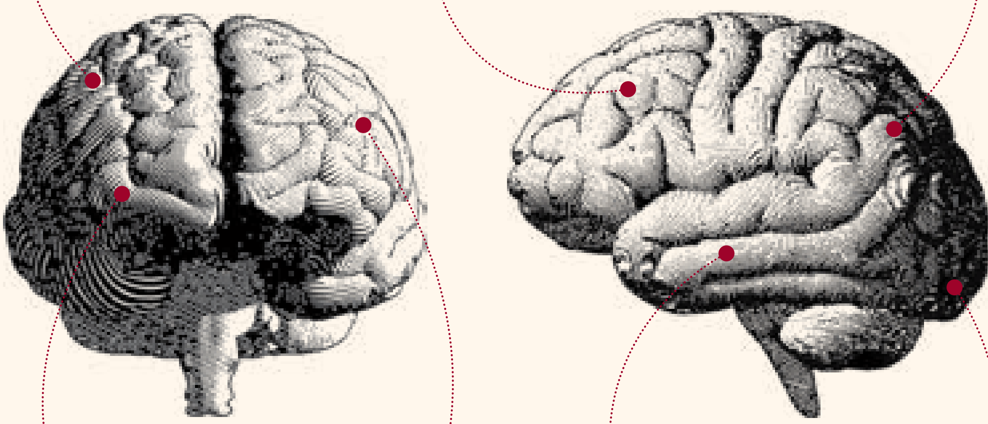
Your Brain, Reading

How humans process and learn from written words

Located in the parietal lobe, the **angular gyrus** facilitates communication between different parts of the brain, permitting humans to simultaneously recognize, understand, and remember words on a page.

Governing the comprehension of spoken and written words, the structure known as **Wernicke's area** is believed to translate meaningless phonemes such as *l*, *o*, and *ve* into meaningful words like *love*.

Situated at the very front of the brain, the **prefrontal cortex** stores information in the working memory and controls selective attention, allowing humans to focus on a text.



The **fusiform gyrus** is important in the recognition of familiar shapes in different contexts, such as that of letters and words, regardless of typeface, **weight**, and CAPITALIZATION.

Crucial for speech function, **Broca's area**, in the brain's left hemisphere, allows humans to read out loud and also plays a role in language comprehension.

Embedded deep inside the temporal lobe, the **hippocampus** forms explicit, nonemotional memories, allowing humans to recall facts learned from reading a book long after they finish it.

Connected to the eyes by optic nerves, the **visual cortex** detects, processes, and recognizes visual information from the outside world.

boy no good, for he does not strive to understand a mistake unless you correct it while he is with you, and one would be far better employed reading. Correction of exercises must have been instituted to prevent masters from getting into mischief in their idle hours.

(3) I dislike compulsory chapel. I like services when I do not feel bound to go; they become merely a meaningless jingle of words when one is forced to attend when one is not in the mood.

(4) I love playing "footer" with the House every day. I have got to know already quite intimately a number of boys whom I should have regarded as wasters in form. This seems to me to prove that a master should share so far as he can in every activity in order to try to get at the point of view of the boys from every angle. I

have therefore joined the Corps, the Debating Society, and the choir.

(5) I object intensely to the mark system. It inculcates selfishness, destroys any chance of getting any cooperative spirit in a form, and is thoroughly immoral. It tends to make boys work from a mercenary motive: they think of nothing but rewards and punishments; they even cheat when they get the chance in order to rise

To live for a time close to great minds is the best kind of education.

—John Buchan, 1940

to a high place in the week's order. These orders bother me. Every Saturday night we have to collect all sorts of marks from other masters, scale and readjust them, and produce an order, which takes up about two hours of valuable time. I don't mind giving up time to any useful end, but I do resent doing so for a senseless one.

November

I dined with the headmaster last night and found myself quoting from a new book on education. Just before I left, he took me aside and said, "The less you read about education, the better. All this newfangled talk about new ideas cuts at the very roots of the great tradition on which the public schools were built up. I never engage a man who has taken a diploma in the theory of education; he can never keep order, he can't teach, he makes the boys rebel against their lot and is altogether very dangerous. I like your keenness, and I think you have made a good beginning, but I warn you now against thinking that there is any reform needed and suggest that you read no more upon a subject which you are called upon to practice, not to theorize about."

I attempted a defense, but he refused to listen. Patting me gently on the back, he said, quite kindly, "When you are my age, you'll see the truth of what I've been telling you: Youth is always in a great hurry to bring about the millennium. It never realizes that no millennium can be brought about by merely destructive criticism. Remember that all these writers are outside the profession and are writing in total ignorance of the conditions under which we labor."

He succeeded in making me feel very arrogant, very youthful, and very much of a fool.

After all, he has some right on his side. Boys do understand the system of marks and of punishment, and I suppose the way of least resistance is the best. Anyway, it is far easier to make a boy work through fear than it is through love of the work; to rouse enthusiasm in the work itself is an exceedingly arduous business. The difficulty is that I hate the idea of caning a boy almost as much as some of the staff relish it. They satisfy a sort of bestial lust by lashing a small boy and hearing him yell. They would be horrified at the suggestion, but I am certain that this is true. One has only to watch a man's eyes when he gives an account of some of his more successful efforts in this direction. On the other hand, I firmly believe that there is a type of boy who can understand no other form of treatment. I only wish such types would not come under my jurisdiction.

December

Now that examinations are upon us, I have been attempting to revise my mathematical and English work, with appalling results. My math sets appear to have learned nothing; just a glimpse here and there of an idea, all mixed up with the most amazing nonsense. I must have gone too fast. There are boys who go again and again over the same ground, term after term, working out quadratic equations, formidable and unwieldy algebraic fractions, solving problems about triangles, parallelograms, and circles quite mechanically and perfectly without the ghost of an idea as to what they all mean or what bearing they have on practical life. They are, if questioned, content to talk about "mental discipline" and "the more odious a task is, the better it is for one's education" in a manner unbearably priggish and foolish.

If a boy can work out a hundred examples correct to type, most of us seem to think that we are teaching him something. On the contrary,

I believe that the only point in mathematical teaching is the training of the mind to think logically and exactly, and to detect all vague and shallow fallacies in argument or writing.

According to this theory, the better a boy was at mathematics, the better he would be at English, whereas the truth is that the able mathematician is rarely able to express himself in writing at all, and certainly is not remarkable for simplicity or direct reasoning power in his essays. It never strikes us that if a boy is capable of working out an intricate equation, he ought to be able to build up a paragraph of carefully connected sentences, all sequent and working to some definite solution or proof.

I am coming to the conclusion that all true education is a striving after Beauty, and what does not actively pursue this end is a waste of effort.

It is not strange that the cult of Beauty is neglected in such a place, for where is Beauty to be found? The answer I find within my rooms: only in my books and my few chosen friends among the boys can I rid myself of the discontent which is so persistently seething within me.

Patrick Traherne, *from* A Schoolmaster's Diary. *Traherne went to work at a public school after finishing his education at Oxford, but eight years later he was fired for what he describes as "tactlessness." Hoping to salvage his reputation, he gave five volumes of his diaries to his friend Stuart Mais, an author and broadcaster, and asked Mais to publish whatever he saw fit. "He looked upon education as the saving grace of a nation or an individual," Mais wrote in his introduction to the published diary. "The object of education with him was to develop imagination and sympathy."*

Girl reciting a lesson in a Jewish community school classroom, Fès, Morocco, 1980. Photograph by Nathan Benn.



c. 1350: France

BOY MEETS WORLD

The true teacher of boys ought to consider carefully the different individualities of his pupils, for they come at seven, as the age of infancy is most often reckoned, to receive the first rudiments. In such novices four things are to be considered, to wit, the state of the weather, a normal body, the physical constitution, and the mental capacity. I say that the state of the weather must be noted because tender limbs are easily struck with cold or penetrated by heat. Wherefore it is advisable to start young children in school about the middle of springtime, and to be on the safe side, it is well to have two classrooms for boys in the same building: one adapted to resist the summer heat and with its windows facing north, which may receive the throng of scholars in summer with the air somewhat cooled off; the other carefully enclosed, which in wintertime can be heated with burning coals according to the custom of the region, and this method is observed in many northern regions. Others build their schools on a slope with a subterranean depression well walled with planks of fir or pine, which in summertime resist the heat and, as winter grows severe, shut out the cold. Also, different clothing should be worn, so that in winter, for example, the boys should be clad in heavy clothing and lighter in summer.

> *Better build schoolrooms for "the boy,"*
> *Than cells and gibbets for "the man."*
> —*Eliza Cook, 1849*

Also, from the time a boy begins his schooling, the soundness of his members should be watched with respect to continuous as well as discrete quantity and also the disposition of parts of the body. Moreover, I say continuous quantity so that none of his organs may exceed or fall short of its appropriate size and that neither hand nor foot nor head may be bent or crooked. And I say discrete quantity lest any one of them be substantially lacking, as when boys are found without arms or feet, or lest the number be superfluous, as the sexual parts are in hermaphrodites, or as in the case of monsters with two heads and one trunk, or those with too many fingers or toes and the like. I say also the disposition of parts of the body, because hunchbacks and those with clubfeet or one eye or infected with major diseases such as epileptics, lepers, and the like are not to be endowed with the nobility of letters, since those with noticeable physical defects neither adorn professorial chairs nor enter the divine priesthood, in order to avoid scandal. But neither are they advantageously admitted in schools, because the boys wantonly laugh at them and disturb their peace of mind. Besides, those who have contagious diseases may infect the other scholars.

Moreover, the physical constitution is to be noted in schoolboys, since there is not one measure of scholastic discipline for all constitutions, just as there is not the same portion of food and drink for all. For those of sanguine temperament are gentle and pacific amid the turmoils of their associations and have a capacity for learning, and seem to pick things up quickly as if it were play and without any great effort. But wantonness often seduces these. The choleric are somewhat less capable but retain more tenaciously and firmly. These, as if in a fury, disturb the others by various movements, for they jump about like young goats and are seldom found in the same place, wherefore they are deluded by inconstancy, unless God has given them the love of discipline. The phlegmatic indeed are sluggish and sleepy and of slower receptivity and ready forgetfulness because of the abundant humidity in them, wherefore they should be stirred up with some frequency, so that their brains may be warmed up. Those who are melancholy, with stony hardness, acquire with the greatest labor but retain with indelible memory, and their obtuseness is overcome by diligent study. The first therefore should be aided with due correction to repress their wantonness. The second lot should be threatened by the monitors and custodians so that their restlessness may be quieted. The third



Jerome Robbins and Mikhail Baryshnikov rehearsing *Other Dances*, New York City, 1976. Photograph by Martha Swope.

and fourth groups are to be fortified by reviews, which help them by frequent repetition of the lessons, for they aid themselves who help others, and he who teaches another instructs himself.

But the mental capacity of boys in the process of learning is quickly ascertained. For in the same kind of composition, some are found bright, others brighter, and others brightest of all. So also are some dull, others duller, and others so dull that their mind is despaired of. And this variety comes from the latitude of degrees of the elements that no scientist or even physician can precisely measure, various aspects of the stars contributing to these differences and their quasi-innumerable influences on the conception, formation, and birth of children, which somehow spread occult affections in human bodies by which human talents are rendered more or less gross or subtle, since, as the art of physiognomy bears witness, the mind follows the body in its dispositions. Therefore let the teacher of boys so direct them that he corrects the timid by words, masters the frivolous with rods, and bestows upon each according to his exigencies the gifts of letters. Nor should the scholars be always kept intent upon their books and writing tablets, but they should be given an occasional recess and set at suitable games, so that their spirits may be raised and their blood stirred by the pleasure of play. For thus the boys' minds that before were fatigued by the tedium of classes are refined and refreshed.

From Commendation of the Clerk. *Believed to have been composed between 1347 and 1365 by a German clergyman who attended the University of Paris, this text was preserved at the end of a manuscript, now in the Vatican Library, that was compiled about a century later and consists of various miscellanea, including notes on recipes, medical procedures, and astrology. In an earlier chapter the author writes that "anyone who derides the faculty of arts either is a clodhopper, because he knows no letters," or "denies his daily bread, refuses the air which he otherwise breathes."*

c. 390 BC: Athens

FALSE PROMISES

If all who are engaged in the profession of education were willing to state the facts instead of making greater promises than they can possibly fulfill, they would not be in such bad repute with the lay public. As it is, however, the teachers who do not scruple to vaunt their powers with utter disregard for the truth have created the impression that those who choose a life of careless indolence are better advised than those who devote themselves to serious study.

Wear your learning, like your watch, in a private pocket; and do not pull it out and strike it merely to show that you have one.
—Philip Dormer Stanhope, 1748

Indeed, who can fail to abhor, yes, to contemn, those teachers, in the first place, who devote themselves to disputation? They pretend to search for truth but straightway at the beginning of their professions attempt to deceive us with lies. I think it is manifest to all that foreknowledge of future events is not vouchsafed to our human nature but that we are so far removed from this prescience that Homer, who has been conceded the highest reputation for wisdom, has pictured even the gods as at times debating among themselves about the future—not that he knew their minds but that he desired to show us that for mankind this power lies in the realms of the impossible.

But these professors have gone so far in their lack of scruple that they attempt to persuade our young men that if they will only study under them, they will know what to do in life and through this knowledge will become happy and prosperous. More than that, although they set themselves up as masters and dispensers of goods so precious, they are not ashamed of asking for them a price of three or four minae! Why, if they were to sell any other commodity for so trifling a fraction of its worth, they would not deny their folly. Nevertheless, although they set so insignificant a price on the whole stock of virtue and happiness, they pretend to wisdom and assume the right to instruct the rest of the world. Furthermore, although they say that they do not want money and speak contemptuously of wealth as "filthy lucre," they hold their hands out for a trifling gain and promise to make their disciples all but immortal!

But it is not these sophists alone who are open to criticism but also those who profess to teach political discourse. For the latter have no interest whatever in the truth, but consider themselves masters of an art if they can attract great numbers of students by the smallness of their charges and the magnitude of their professions and get something out of them. They are themselves so stupid and conceive others to be so dull that although the speeches they compose are worse than those some laymen improvise, they nevertheless promise to make their students such clever orators that they will not overlook any of the possibilities a subject affords. More than that, they do not attribute any of this power either to the practical experience or to the native ability of the student but undertake to transmit the science of discourse as simply as they would teach the letters of the alphabet, not having taken the trouble to examine the nature of each kind of knowledge, but thinking that because of the extravagance of their promises, they themselves will command admiration, and the teaching of discourse will be held in higher esteem—oblivious of the fact that the arts are made great not by those who are without scruple in boasting about them but by those who are able to discover all the resources each art affords.

For myself, I should have preferred above great riches that philosophy had as much power as these men claim; for, possibly, I should not have been the very last in the profession nor had the least share in its profits. But since it has no such power, I could wish that this prating might cease. For I note that the bad repute that results from this does not affect only the offenders. All the rest of us who are in the same profession share in the opprobrium.

Big Fan on Campus

Fictional institutions of higher education and their real-life inspirations

Fictional Institution	Appears In	Based On	The Link
Greendale Community College	The NBC sitcom *Community* (2009–15)	Glendale Community College, California	Series creator Dan Harmon was inspired to write the show after taking a Spanish class at Glendale.
Boulder Dam College	The 1934 Three Stooges short *Three Little Pigskins*	University of Notre Dame	In the film, the slapstick trio is mistaken for the Three Horsemen of Boulder Dam, a send-up of the Four Horsemen of Notre Dame, backfielders for the university's football team from 1922 to 1924.
Athena College	Philip Roth's 2000 novel *The Human Stain*	Princeton University	Roth's inspiration for the novel came from his friend Melvin Tumin, a professor of sociology at Princeton, who realized that two students enrolled in his class in 1985 had never turned up for a single lecture. In the 2003 film adaptation, Williams College stands in for Athena's campus.
Hampden College	Donna Tartt's 1992 novel *The Secret History*	Bennington College	Tartt set her debut novel at a fictional version of her Vermont alma mater, where she, like her Dionysian protagonists, studied classics. Fictional versions of Bennington also appear in the works of Tartt's onetime classmates Bret Easton Ellis and Jonathan Lethem.
California University, Los Angeles	The 2001 film *Legally Blonde*	University of Southern California	Although USC, where the character Elle Woods attends college in the book that inspired the film, was used as a filming location, the university refused to allow the filmmakers to display its name on-screen.
Faber College	The 1978 film *National Lampoon's Animal House*	Dartmouth College	Writer Chris Miller based the film's script on experiences he had at his notoriously rowdy Dartmouth fraternity, Alpha Delta Phi. The campus of the University of Oregon serves as Faber College in the film.

I marvel when I observe these men setting themselves up as instructors of youth who cannot see that they are applying the analogy of an art with hard-and-fast rules to a creative process. Apart from these teachers, who does not know that the art of using letters remains fixed and unchanged, so that we continually and invariably use the same letters for the same purposes, while exactly the reverse is true of the art of discourse? What has been said by one speaker is not equally useful for the speaker who comes after him; on the contrary, he is accounted most skilled in this art who speaks in a manner worthy of his subject and yet is able to discover in it topics that are in no way the same as those used by others. But the greatest proof of the difference between these two arts is that oratory is good only if it has the qualities of fitness for the occasion, propriety of style, and originality of treatment, while in the case of letters, there is no such need whatsoever.

So that those who make use of such analogies ought more justly to pay out than to accept fees, since they attempt to teach others when they are themselves in great need of instruction.

I think all intelligent people will agree that while many of those who have pursued philosophy have remained in private life, others who have never taken lessons from any one of the sophists have become able orators and statesmen. Ability, whether in speech or in any other activity, is found in those who are well endowed by nature and have been schooled by practical experience. Formal training makes such men more skillful and more resourceful in discovering the possibilities of a subject. It teaches them to take from a readier source the topics they otherwise hit upon in haphazard fashion. But it cannot fully fashion men who are without natural aptitude into good debaters or writers—although it is capable of leading them to self-improvement and a greater degree of intelligence on many subjects.

I hold that it is not so very difficult to obtain a knowledge of the elements out of which we make and compose all discourses if you entrust yourself not to those who make rash promises but to those who have some knowledge of these things. But to choose from these elements those that should be employed for each subject, to join them together, to arrange them properly, and also not to miss what the occasion demands but appropriately to adorn the whole speech with striking thoughts and to clothe it in flowing and melodious phrases—these things, I hold, require much study and are the task of a vigorous and imaginative mind. For this the student must not only have the requisite aptitude. He must also learn the different kinds of discourse and practice himself in their use. The teacher, for his part, must so expound the principles of the art with the utmost possible exactness as to leave out nothing that can be taught. For the rest, he must in himself set such an example of oratory that the students who have taken form under his instruction and are able to pattern after him will from the outset show in their speaking a degree of grace and charm that is not found in others. When all of these requisites are found together, then the devotees of philosophy will achieve complete success.

Isocrates, *from* Against the Sophists. *Isocrates was born in Athens in 436* BC*, five years before the onset of the Peloponnesian War. The son of a wealthy family, he is said to have studied with such renowned scholars and rhetoricians as Tisias, Prodicus, and Gorgias. After suffering financial losses from the war, Isocrates gave up writing forensic speeches and began working as a teacher of rhetoric. In one treatise he argued that because Athens owed its cultural and military dominance to rhetoric, he had given far more to the state as a teacher than he could ever hope to receive in return.*

Allegory of Geometry, by Laurent de La Hyre, 1649.



1910: Atlanta

COMMUNITY SERVICE

If you propose to educate the Negro into the possibility of full citizenship in the modern world of culture, one thing you have got to admit at the very outset, and that is he cannot, to any appreciable extent, get that education from the white people about him. Now, this is true on the whole of no other constituent part of the American people. If higher college training is asked for poor American boys, for Armenians, or for white mountaineers, it is sufficiently just to say there is at present a more crying need for certain forms of elementary training among these boys than for college training. Their guidance and training in the higher matters of social evolution can be safely left to the result of their contact with the best of their fellow citizens. But with the Negro, this is not true. By the silent decree of the nation he is, in the South, shut off and isolated. And much of this program is being easily accepted in the North.

What the Negro needs, therefore, of the world and civilization, he must largely teach himself; what he learns of social organization and efficiency, he must learn from his own people. His conceptions of social uplift and philanthropy must come from within his own ranks, and he must above all make and set and follow his own ideals of life and character. Now, this is putting upon a people just emerged from slavery, with neither time, traditions, nor experience, a tremendous task. In strict justice, it is asking more of this people than the American nation has any right to ask. Nevertheless, this race is not stopping to await justice in this matter; it is not asking about the righteousness of past conduct; it is not even pausing—as perhaps it ought—to discuss the advisability of present policies; but it is asking you, here and now, to place in its hands the indispensable facilities for teaching itself those things that it must know if it is going to share modern civilization.

Moreover, just as in justice you cannot ask a man to raise himself by his own bootstraps, just so you cannot logically and justly expect that a people will furnish itself, under such circumstances, with its own chief means of uplift. The natural temptation for a group in our situation is to look around them upon their neighbors, pick out that which in their inexperience seems to be the cause of success, and advancing and seizing it lightly, try to march on. If the thing that they choose is momentarily popular, they will receive for choosing it exaggerated applause; just as they were applauded in 1868 for political acumen because politics were popular, just so today they are applauded for showing signs of industrial shrewdness, because industry is the ruling movement today. Now, both politics and industry are the leading and main foundations of every successful state, but the great point is that for any people to be successfully civilized they must know how to handle those great tools of advance, and they can learn this only from a knowledge of the world's experience through the teaching of a cultured class.

> *The trouble with education is that we always read everything when we're too young to know what it means. And the trouble with life is that we're always too busy to reread it later.*
> —*Margaret Ayer Barnes, 1930*

The community must be able to take hold of its individuals and give them such a social heritage, such present social teachings, and such compelling social customs as will force them along the lines of progress, and not into the great forests of death. What is needed then for any group of advancing people is the college-bred community; for no matter how far the college may fail in individual cases, it is after all the center where knowledge of the past connects with the ideal of the future. Every community, therefore, must be college-bred; and that does not mean that every individual must be a college graduate; it may be that the

proportion of college-bred men may be small, even infinitesimal; and still the community, by tradition and heritage, will hold fast to what the past has taught the world of high and ideal future accomplishment. But given a group or community that does not know the message of the past and does not have within its own number the men who can feel it and is separated from contact with outside groups who can teach it—given such a community, you have a desperate situation that calls for immediate remedy. It is such a situation among the Negroes in the South that calls for schools like Atlanta University.

There ought to be in the South today at least five institutions with an endowment of a million dollars each whose business it would be to furnish the teachers and professional men and thinkers and industrial leaders for the masses of the black people of the South. Such colleges would represent not the capstone of the social organization of the South but rather its vast foundation. As a matter of fact, such institutions today, tremendously hampered as they are in their work, have nevertheless begun this work of giving communities college training and have so far done remarkably well. To them is due the establishment of the Negro school system in the South with 21,000 teachers; the establishment and conduct of the great and efficient industrial schools; the development and guidance to a considerable extent of the 35,000 Negro churches and the accumulation personally and through their influence of the more than $650 million of Negro wealth. It would, of course, be wrong to say that Negro colleges were responsible for every step that the black man has taken in advance since the war; but it is not too much to say that but for the black men trained in the colleges North and South, and the students who were in turn trained by them, the major part of this progress would have been utterly impossible. Moreover, it is not simply in education that the Negro college accomplishes its mission of human culture. Nearly all the adjuncts by which culture is diffused in the North have been absent among Negroes in the South: the public lecture and public library; the sympathetic newspaper, organized charity, and social settlements; the Young Men's Christian Association and women's clubs, etc. Today all these instruments of culture are making their appearance slowly but surely, and they are coming directly from the Negro colleges and from centers of influence where the graduates of such colleges are working. The college-bred community, therefore, in the South is already beginning to be a reality, but it needs tremendous reinforcement and continual impulse.



Spinario (Boy Pulling a Thorn from His Foot), by Antico, c. 1501.

W.E.B. Du Bois, *from "The College-Bred Community." Du Bois studied under William James and George Santayana at Harvard and began teaching sociology and economics at Atlanta University in 1898. A few years later he helped establish the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. He ultimately separated from the organization, and his growing interest in communism led to the U.S. government confiscating his passport for several years. In 1961 Du Bois moved to Ghana to work on an* Encyclopedia Africana*; while living there, he became a Ghanaian citizen.*

1980: Auckland

DON'T LET THE BABY DRIVE THE BOOK

Ideally, a small pile of good books awaits a new baby's arrival. Friends and relations often request suggestions for presents, and gift money can be earmarked for books. Keep the baby's books within reach, and make a practice of showing them to her from the day you first bring her home.

As for the physical management of read-aloud sessions, you must accept that any baby worth his salt will want to grab the book as soon as his physical development renders this possible. This does not mean that he is not interested; on the contrary, he is so interested that he wants to experience that delectable object (the book) in the way he likes best of all. He wants to grab it and cram it into his mouth.

Your best course of action is to play for time. If you can arrange for him to experience real visual and aural satisfaction from contact with books, you may find that he modifies his snatching behavior at a surprisingly early age. Be sure to give him a rattle or similar toy to suck while listening and watching, and remember that even at this early stage, a dramatic performance, with actions and changes of voice tone, will be more entertaining than a monotonous one.

Over the last decade, publishers have responded to an upsurge of interest in very early education with an increasing flow of books. While I applaud this trend, I still insist that any

The Riding School, by Franz Marc, 1913.





School scene, detail of a miniature from a fourteenth-century French *Bible Historiale*.

book you happen to like will serve as well; it is your involvement with your baby that matters most. And why worry if the characters in your baby's books are operating at a level she will not reach for several years? This is true of the people around her, who walk, talk, and conduct their lives in complex ways before her spongelike contemplation. How much could she possibly learn from the boring company of other babies?

Babies need people: talking, laughing, warmhearted people constantly drawing them into their lives and offering them the world for a playground. Let's give them books to parallel this experience; books where language and illustration activate the senses, so that meaning slips in smoothly, in the wake of feeling.

Please—please!—don't give up because your baby snatches at the book and appears to want only to eat it or throw it away. Canceling the whole program in the face of a few setbacks is like deciding to keep your child well away from the water until she can swim. There is ample evidence that three- and four-year-olds who meet books for the first time in their lives are inattentive and destructive. Your baby can put this stage behind her in the very early days if you are patient. A little and often is the rule of thumb.

Dorothy Butler, *from* Babies Need Books. *Butler attended Auckland Girls' Grammar School, where she later worked as an assistant to pay for university classes. She trained to be a schoolteacher and in 1962 established a collective preschool in Birkenhead. Elsewhere in this book, she advocates for the "performance" of reading aloud to babies, even books whose content is beyond their grasp: "Don't hesitate to move in time to the rhythm, to accentuate rhymes, to tickle or cuddle the baby at appropriate points, in short, to perform with style."*

c. 1005: Cerne Abbas

After the Fact

Students: We children bid you, Master, that you teach us to speak correctly, for we are unlearned, and we speak corruptly.

Teacher: What would you like to talk about?

Students: What do we care what we talk about? As long as it's correct! Let it be useful, not worthless or base.

Teacher: Will you be flogged in order to learn?

Students: We would rather be flogged on behalf of wisdom than not to know it. But we know you to be mild and unwilling to lash out against us unless you're compelled by us.

Teacher: I ask you, why are you so eager to learn?

Students: Because we do not want to be like dumb animals who know nothing but grass and water.

Teacher: And what do you want?

Students: We want to be wise.

Teacher: In which kind of wisdom? Will you be plastic or multifarious in your pretense, deceitful in speech, illogical, sneaky, speaking well and thinking evil, subjugated by charming words, weakened by guile within, just as tombs are decorated on their exteriors but full of stench within?

Students: We don't want to be wise in that way, since he is not wise who seduces himself with deception.

Teacher: But what do you want?

Students: We would like to be sincere without hypocrisy, and wise so that we turn away from evil and do good. However, you still dispute with us more profoundly than our age can take; but speak with us concerning our habits, and not so deeply.

Teacher: I will do just as you bid. You, boy, what did you do today?

Student: I did many things. Last night, when I heard the knell, I arose from my bed and went out to the church and sang nocturn with my brethren. After that we sang the "Of All Saints" and morning hymns. After this, prime and seven psalms with litanies and the chapter mass. Afterward tierce and did the mass of the day. After this we sang sexte, and we ate and drank and slept, and again we arose and sang none. And now we are here before you, ready to hear what you have to say to us.

Teacher: When will you sing vespers or compline?

Student: When it is time.

Teacher: Were you beaten today?

Student: I was not, since I am attentive.

Teacher: And what did your companions do?

Student: Why do you ask me about them? I don't dare give up our secrets! Each one of us knows if he was beaten or not.

Teacher: What do you eat during the day?

Student: I still enjoy meat, since I am a child living under the rod.

Teacher: What more do you eat?

Student: Vegetables and eggs, fish and cheese, butter and beans, and all clean things I eat—with much thankfulness.

Teacher: You are exceedingly greedy if you eat everything that is in front of you.

Student: I am not so much of a whirlpool that I ingest every kind of food at one meal!

Teacher: But in what manner do you eat?

Student: I enjoy at times this food, other times that—with sobriety, as befits a monk, not with voracity, since I am not a glutton.

Teacher: And what do you drink?

Student: Ale if I have it, or water if I don't have ale.

Teacher: You don't drink wine?

Student: I am not so wealthy that I might buy myself wine. And wine is not a drink for children, nor for the stupid, but for the old and the wise.

Teacher: Where do you sleep?

Student: I sleep in a dormitory with my brethren.

Teacher: Who wakes you to sing nocturn?

Student: Sometimes I hear the knell and I get up; sometimes my teacher wakes me stiffly with a rod.

Teacher: Well, you children and winsome students, your teacher reminds you that you be obedient to divine teaching, and that you keep yourself noble in every place. Go obediently when you hear church bells, and go into church and bow humbly before the holy altar, and stand obediently and sing together with one voice, and pray for your sins, and go out without any high jinks to the cloister or to school.

Aelfric, *from his* Colloquy. *Born in the middle of the tenth century, likely in Wessex, Aelfric joined the school of the bishop Aethelwold at Winchester around 970. His time there as a student inspired this didactic text, in which a Latin master instructs—and is sometimes outwitted by—a young monk and his companions, each representing a different trade. "The master may rule the schoolroom," one modern commentator notes of Aelfric's willingness to poke fun at the teacher, "but the craftsmen show him that he doesn't have all the answers."*

Education, by Claude Gillot, c. 1700.



c. 1908: Paris

MONSTROUS ERRORS

The Rational Education of Children

A league for the rational education of children? But are not the most rational methods for the education of children everywhere applied? Alas! All those who have studied these questions with complete independence of spirit, all those who have observed teachers and pupils, unhampered by preconceived ideas, know that in matters of education and instruction, there is hardly a place where anything is done that ought to be done.

Unluckily, such are very few in number, and that is why the current opinion is that the education of children is one of the domains in which the most has been accomplished. The majority do not know. Some, it must be said, voluntarily deceive themselves as to the value of our present instruction. The latter, however, is almost always merely a facade, a sumptuous and pretentious facade, behind which are hidden lamentable inutilities or monstrous errors.

It will be readily understood that we cannot offer here a complete criticism of the official school, with its overcrowded classes, as at present in operation. Everyone knows that such a quota of pupils is imposed on a single instructor, that the most gifted teacher, armed even with the most intelligent methods and animated with whatever zeal he may have, must confine himself to what is known in professional lingo as "maintaining discipline."

Almost everywhere the pupils still learn textbooks on grammar, arithmetic, geography, and history by heart. That is to say that the child's memory exclusively is addressed instead of his intelligence being solicited. Is it necessary to urge the result of such a method?

Hardly ever, even when it would be easy to do, is the living reality approached. Let us suppose ourselves in a village. A few yards from the threshold of the school, the grass is springing, the flowers are blooming; insects hum against the classroom windowpanes; but the pupils are studying natural history out of books!

A graver thing than all the rest: our unfortunate children do not always enjoy the few hours of free recreation necessary to their physical development. Behold them, hardly out of the classroom, hurrying toward the house where they will again sit till evening bent over tasks, three-quarters of which are perfectly useless. It often happens that between the morning and afternoon classes, they do not even have time to eat their meal as they should. Instead we make them learn lessons on the necessity of physical exercise and the hygiene of digestion.

> *These days people seek knowledge, not wisdom. Knowledge is of the past; wisdom is of the future.*
>
> —*Vernon Cooper, 1990*

Nor let us forget the question of examinations, that plague of all teaching. In reality the children do not study; they prepare for examinations. It begins among the very little ones, with the certificate for primary studies. Thus the exclusive aim of everyone's efforts, the teacher's as well as the pupil's, is no longer to advance, quietly and surely, in the discovery of new facts and truths, but on a fixed date, to have handed out—all means being allowable, provided they lead to success—a certificate of knowledge. They are content with the sign; the thing itself is held cheap.

It must be admitted that almost the sole preoccupation is to furnish the pupils certain information, judged, no one knows very well why, to be indispensable. Without, moreover, succeeding in it! Has not a recent sensational inquiry proved that in a little while after quitting school, almost nothing of what it was believed had been put there remained in the brains of our French youth?

Even if our children retained all that it has been decided on high they ought to know, it would prove little in favor of such teaching as is done today. Relatively to the present total of knowledge, the school can teach but a ridiculously small fraction of this knowledge. School is

kept, on the contrary, in order to give the pupil the means of acquiring knowledge and the taste for it, that is to say, in order to fortify his intelligence, to provide him with a sure logic, indispensable instruments for study, and also to interest him in all possible manifestations of human activity.

Whether you teach history or agriculture, literature or chemistry, arithmetic or geography, you can do it in two ways: in a way to fortify the judgment or to falsify and atrophy it in the germ; the way that will attach the pupil always to the order of knowledge that you will open to him for the first time or that which will disgust him with it forever. The school fails in its essential function if it does not inculcate in the child an enthusiastic love of life and of humanity. It is from this standpoint that it should establish contact between knowledge and the child.

> *As soon as you start asking what education is for, what the use of it is, you're abandoning the basic assumption of any true culture, that education is worthwhile for its own sake.*
> *—Ann Bridge, 1946*

Each branch of knowledge provokes its particular emotion, its special interest. To arouse these different sorts of interest or emotion in the child, to arrange all so that these successive "initiations" may take place under the best possible conditions, such should be the first and constant care of the master.

Such are, but too briefly indicated, the essential ideas that our league wishes to defend and to propagate everywhere.

The School and Neutrality

At the moment when the clericals seem to want to resume the old battle against the secular school, at the moment in which discussions about the neutral school are beginning again, we shall surely be asked what attitude we intend to take in the presence of the child concerning the great religious, philosophical, political, and social problems that agitate the present hour. We might declare that we are pedagogues first of all, confining ourselves to the investigation of good methods of teaching. But we shall not make this reply, because there is something more in teaching than a question of method. And that is why "neutrality in the school" can be nothing but hypocrisy.

Let us suppose that we have succeeded in expurgating programs and manuals of all embarrassing questions. Can we prevent the episodes of social life from putting the same questions, in the form of naive interrogatories, into the little ones' mouths every day? Can we prevent war, crime, rioting, strikes, assassinations, poverty? And when these "embarrassing questions" have once risen to the child's lips, can we give any other answer than that which our conscience dictates, cries to us?

There is no good "neutral instruction," because all good teaching presupposes force, warmth, conviction. The ardent, the enthusiastic, and the generous soul of the child needs an atmosphere of conviction and enthusiasm. The educator should not dissimulate his philosophical and social preferences. We should not hide the fact that we are democrats, socialists, and atheists in the fullest and highest sense of these words. We should not, in the school, hide the fact that we want to develop in the children such an eagerness to live, such a confidence in life, such an interest in terrestrial realities, that there would soon remain no place for dreams about the beyond. We should not, in the school, hide the fact that we would awaken in the children the desire for a society of men truly free and truly equal, equal economically as well as politically, and hence of real solidarity; a society without violence, without hierarchies, and without privilege of any sort.

But in our so legitimate desire to form the young generations for the conquest of liberty and social equality, we must not forget that we have no right to *impose* this ideal on the child, however beautiful and true it may be. Let us not take advantage of the fact that he is almost without defense against our assertions to make him admit, whatsoever it may be, without making him understand it. It is not a matter of substituting one dogma for another dogma,



Untitled (School Girls), by Mark Sweeney, c. 2000.

one catechism for another catechism. In this as in all other things, let us try not to have the child *recite* his lesson coldly but to have him really perceive, feel, and understand the utility and the grandeur of the aim sought. Let us try to awaken his conscience, interest his instinct of justice, enkindle his courage and his pride. Let us remember that our first care should be to prepare for life healthy and robust beings, beings conscious and clear-minded, endowed with a critical spirit, capable of discerning and deciding for themselves; and that it is thus that the school will labor most surely for human emancipation.

And above all, let us not forget that in matters of education, there is but one right superior to all others and before which all others should yield: the right of the child.

From the manifesto of the International League for the Rational Education of Children. The anarchist educator Francisco Ferrer founded the coeducational Modern School in Barcelona in 1901. He was forced to close it five years later when he was imprisoned for trying to assassinate Alfonso XIII. After his release, he moved to Paris and established the International League, declaring, "There should be nothing more free and supple, less regulated in advance, than school life." An English translation of this manifesto appeared in Emma Goldman's magazine Mother Earth.

1885: Eastern Cape

BESIDE THE POINT

The things I really hate the most
disconcert me. As you can see,
all that I'm lacking is support
to smash the whites to smithereens.

These creatures keep on demanding
small contributions of cash from us
for the land and for the roadways,
for forests and education;
what's the point of education
when it arouses such jealousy?

Playing with History, by Bill Woodrow, 2002.



The truth is this, they snatched this land
when by rights it belongs to us;
we've been turned into strangers,
requiring a pass to travel:
it's a dazzling magic trick,
a meticulous white campaign.

We are old, we grow infirm,
we gave birth to you young men,
we have eyes that we can shut,
but we've watched them for a while,
with their jealousy and envy.

With the education that we've had,
we see them go about their business:
discrimination's sleeping,
the long-lasting hostility
between the black man and the white.

The whites from overseas
talk of this black nation
in terms such as these:
"Languages like Latin,
Hebrew, as well as Greek,
are unsuited to black people."
Prejudice propels them.

People like us who are black
have sons who work in offices:
they speak and write in English,
only their color distinguishes them,
but their pay amounts to nothing,
they all have their wages docked
so they never earn more than whites.

There's a plentiful supply
of blacks who serve as teachers,
receiving their training from whites;
they study year after year
to earn small scraps of paper,
they were set on course by whites,
who are highly educated,
until, satisfied, they were thanked,
when there was the prospect,
while they were still in school,
that they would reap rewards
on entering employment.
When they gained employment
as teachers or whatever,

discrimination entered unannounced,
the reason we've assembled here;
those people, after they'd studied,
completed all requirements,
discovered that they earned nothing.

What's the point of education?
Why should we feel any gratitude?
When were we ever offered help?
What exactly are you doing?
Why do you point your fingers
at this nation of black people?

Remarkably, blacks are treated alike,
whether or not they're schooled
and speak a dignified language:
promotion is out of the question,
on the contrary they're despised.

William Wellington Gqoba, *from "A Great Debate on Education: A Parable." Gqoba was born in 1840, several decades after British missionaries first settled among his Xhosa-speaking Bantu clan. He was a student and then a teacher at the Lovedale Missionary Institution, where he edited the school newspaper, in which this poem was first published. It concludes, "You must be careful of the way / you meddle with education. / Even stupid people like us / appreciate completely / that a little education / presents a major problem."*

Detail from the tomb of University of Bologna lecturer Bonifacio Galluzzi, c. 1346.



c. 1556: Guatemala

LEARNING LOSS

This, then, is the beginning
of the conception of humans.

It is said these men were
simply framed and shaped:
they had no mother,
they had no father.
It was simply the pure spirit
and glinting spark of insight
of the Framer and the Shaper,
of Sovereign and Quetzal Serpent.

They appeared with manly faces
and began to breathe,
and so they became,
and they looked around them,
their vision coming all at once:
their sight was completed
by the world around them,
their knowledge was completed
by everything under the sky.
When they gazed about them,
they looked intently and deeply
into the womb of the sky and earth.
It took less than a moment to take it in.
In that brief time, they saw everything.
They had not yet taken a step,
when they already knew the world.

They gave thanks
to the Framer and Shaper:
"Truly, we thank you,
two times and three times,
that we were given form,
that we were given mouths,
that we were given faces,
so now we speak and we listen,
now we ponder and we move.

Well we know what we
learned and saw, far and near.
We saw the great and the small:
all there is in sky and earth."

Their knowledge of everything
they saw was perfect
as they looked into the four corners
and along the four sides
of everything within the sky and earth.

But this did not sound good
to the Framer and the Shaper.
"It's not good, what they said,

Albert Einstein with a student, Princeton, New Jersey, c. 1945.



the ones that we have wrought:
'We have learned everything,
great and small,' they say."

So they took their knowledge back,
She who has borne children,
and He who has planted them.
"Now what will we do with them
so their vision merely reaches
nearby, so they will simply see
a little of the face of the earth?
It's not good what they say.
They were merely called
to be framed and shaped,
not to be mistaken for gods.
So we will simply undo them
a little. This is what is wanted.
Their deeds could rival ours.
Their knowledge reaches far.
They could grasp everything."

Then they remade the essence
of the people framed and shaped.
Their eyes were lightly clouded,
by Heart of Sky.
Like breath upon a mirror
or wind upon the water,
their eyes were veiled.
Their great vision was blunted.
Now they could only see nearby.
Things were only clear to them
right where they stood.
So their knowledge was lost,
the wisdom of those first four people.
It was lost there at its beginning,
at the very root of its planting.

From the Popol Vuh. *Chronicling the history of the K'iche' people up to the year 1550, the* Popol Vuh *was first transcribed from hieroglyphics into the Roman alphabet around 1555. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, it was translated into Spanish by the Dominican friar Francisco Ximénez, who thought that it would give his fellow missionaries greater insight into the minds of the locals they hoped to convert. For his parishioners, Ximénez wrote, the* Popol Vuh *was the "doctrine which they first imbibed with their mother's milk, and all of them knew it almost by heart."*

1972: Honolulu

EASY LISTENING

"*Nana ka maka. Hoʻolohe. Paʻa ka waha. Hoʻopili.*" (Observe. Listen. Keep the mouth shut. Imitate.)

Such was the teaching tenet of old Hawaii. The elders well knew that "*I ka nana no a ʻike*, by observing, one learns. *I ka hoʻolohe no a hoʻomaopopo*, by listening, one commits to memory. *I ka hana no a ʻike*, by practice, one masters the skill."

To this a final directive was added: Never interrupt. Wait until the lesson is over and the elder gives you permission. Then—and not until then—*nīnau*. Ask questions.

For easier 'tis to learn and recollect
What moves derision than what claims respect.
—*Horace, c. 14* BC

These precepts were followed long before reading and writing came upon the Hawaiian scene. They continued to be observed through the introduction of a written language and the establishment of schools. They influence many Hawaiian children of today, both at home and in the classroom.

In the Hawaiian *ʻohana*, the extended family of the past, the young child began to watch, listen, and therefore learn, long before parents or grandparents began any planned instruction. All young children learn from observation and imitation. For the Hawaiian child, the difference lay in the rich and constant opportunity to observe.

For one thing, there were so many *ʻohana* members! Some twenty to thirty relatives spanning four generations might live in the same household. There was so much activity of crafts, of growing and preparing food, of occupational pursuits and *pau ka hana* (after work) fun. There were family discussions, the chants of elders, the legends and riddles to listen to. In this total, active *ʻohana* life, the child was welcome. Few if any secrets of speech or act existed within the family.

All of the *ʻohana* members, from the great-grandmother down to the sibling only two years older, were the child's teachers. Where the youngster's safety was concerned, they were all disciplinarians as well.

Survival in precarious circumstances may have been the underlying basis for the Hawaiian prohibition on interrupting with questions. Questions—until time for them was clearly specified—were not merely rude; they were a distraction and therefore a possible source of danger. The fisherman or gatherer of *ʻopihi* must constantly observe wind and tide. Distract him, and the big wave might come, sweeping him out to sea or dashing him to death against the rocks. There was a proper time for *nīnau*, serious and well-thought-out questions. *Nīele*, frivolous, ill-timed, and "nosy" questions, showed no respect for one's seniors. Besides, the chattering *nīele* child obviously could not observe and listen; could not conceptualize a task while foolish queries poured forth from his mouth!

By the time a child was about four, he usually had some small tasks that entailed a measure of responsibility. The four-year-old might be told to keep an eye on the one-year-old. And for most three-to-five-year-olds, "fetching" things for a beloved *kupuna* (elder) was an important and delightful task. Praising children was not a Hawaiian characteristic, but in the loving *ʻohana*, the child who fetched Grandmother her *kīhei* (shawl) sensed, in her expression and tone of voice, that she was pleased and approving.

For the ordinary child, lessons, lectures, and tasks left plenty of time for play. This was not true of the *punahele*, the child scheduled to be the future *hanau mua* (family senior). Here, we turn to coauthor Pukui: "The grandparents went out of their way for the *punahele*. Teaching, teaching, teaching, all the time. I know because I was a *punahele*. Every day, Grandmother would quiz me: 'Do you remember the place we went yesterday and the *ʻaumakua* who guards it?' And then three days later, 'Now, tell me again. What was the name of the *ʻaumakua*? How far does his *kuleana* extend?'"



Scenes at the University with Images of the Ancient Sages (detail), Japan, seventeenth century.

Both *punahele* and the ordinary child had an effective aid to memorizing. It was the chant. Counting, family genealogy, prayers, legends, all were repeated in the rhythm of the chant. Before Hawaii had a written language, the memorized chant was Hawaii's history book and almanac, birth record and legal document.

Perhaps hearing his elders chant formal prayers and ancestral tales helped the child learn a kind of "double vocabulary." To communicate he must learn both the ostensible and the hidden meaning of words; he must learn the allegory of Hawaiian speech. He must learn that when Grandfather spoke of hearing *ka ʻowe nahenahe a ka wai* (the soft murmur of the water), he referred to gossip; that *ku ka lahea* (the bad smell arises) might describe the increasing, spreading result of one offensive action; that *ka ʻopua haʻaheo i ka lewa* (the cloud billows stand proudly in the air) was really a statement that some particular person was inordinately conceited.

When a child was somewhere around seven years old, a new dimension was added to his education: now he learned to recite *na pule* (prayers). Up until then, family adults had said the prayers and rituals for him. The little boy, now admitted to the *hale mua* (men's eating house), learned to pray and began to take some part in the ritual feeding of the family gods. The little girl now prayed, though the feeding of the gods was always the men's prerogative. These first prayers were formal ones. Later the child would make more spontaneous appeals to the family *ʻaumakua*. Now was the time for memorizing ancient chanted appeals to the deities.

With the learning of prayers, the youngster gradually assumed a new and grave responsibility: He was now accountable for his own relationships with the gods. Now he himself must be careful of acts or omissions that offended the *ʻaumakua*. Now he realized that the *ʻaumakua* could punish him for *hana hewa* (wrongdoing).

Mary Kawena Pukui, **E.W. Haertig**, *and* **Catherine A. Lee**, *from* Look to the Source. *This book was the product of seven years of weekly meetings of the Hawaiian Culture Committee of the Queen Liliʻuokalani Children's Center starting in the mid-1960s. The educator and ethnologist Pukui, who was born on Hawaii Island in 1895 to a Hawaiian mother and a white American father, served as the group's primary source on Hawaiian culture.* Nana i ke kumu *(look to the source) is a Hawaiian saying; the word* kumu *signifies both "source" and "teacher."*

c. 1990: London

READ THE ROOM

We've just pulled into the Motel Del Mar, aka Aldgate: we are taking the Circle Line in a counterclockwise direction. The pillars are covered in pale turquoise tiles, with lilac diamonds on a single band of cream—it's a color scheme I associate with paper-wrapped soaplets & tiny towels with embroidered anchors. What kind of childhood is this for a child? He's never even been to Daytona.

I've been taking him every day to ride the Circle Line to stay out of the cold: I can type at night when he goes to bed, but we can't have the fire on twenty hours a day. He hates it because I won't let him bring Cunliffe. Too bad.

I remember once about ten years ago, or rather eight, reading *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X, in a Circle Line train that had stopped at Baker Street. That lovely soft-grained sepia light filtered down; it was about eleven and very quiet. I thought: Yes, to live the life of the mind is the truest form of happiness. Reading Aristotle was not even then my idea of intellectual felicity, but after all it is possible to lead the life of the mind without reading Aristotle. If I could read anything I wanted, I would read *The Semantic Tradition from Kant to Carnap*.

This is absolutely not possible today, with L interrupting every minute or so to ask a word. He is in a bad mood because he hates having to ask; I think he thinks if he asks enough I will let him bring the Homeric dictionary tomorrow. James Mill wrote an entire history of India in the intervals of providing lexical assistance to little John—but he did not have to load a twin pushchair with a small library, a small child, Repulsive, Junior Birdman, & Bit—and with all the advantages of a wife, servants, & a fire in the room, he was still impatient and short-tempered. Repulsive is a three-foot stuffed gorilla; the Birdman is a two-foot fighting turtle misnamed Donatello by its maker; and Bit is a one-inch rubber mouse designed to be lost thirty or forty times a day.

Instruction, by Thomas Hart Benton, 1940.



Even when he is not interrupting, people keep coming up. Sometimes they scold him playfully for coloring in a book, and sometimes they stare goggle-eyed when they realize he is reading it. They don't seem to realize how bad this is for him. Today a man came up and said playfully: You shouldn't color in a book.

L: Why not?

Playful: It's not nice if somebody wants to read it.

L: But I am reading it.

Idiot, winking idiotically at me: Oh really? What's it about then?

L: I'm at the bit where they go to the land of the dead, and this is the bit where she changes them into pigs, and this is the bit where they go to the king of the winds, and this is the bit where they sharpen a stick in the fire and gouge out the eye of the Cyclops because it only had one eye, so if they gouged it out, it couldn't see.

Brain left school at six while body did time: Well, that wasn't very nice now was it?

L: If someone's about to eat you, you don't have to be nice. It's acceptable to kill in self-defense.

Slow on the uptake (goggle-eyed): Blimey.

L (for the five-hundredth time that day): What does that mean?

Slow: It means that's absolutely amazing. (To me) Aren't you worried about what will happen when he goes to school?

I: Desperately.

Only trying to be helpful: There's no need to be sarcastic.

L: It's not a particularly difficult language. The alphabet is a precursor to the one in which English is written and very similar to it.

Now Only is amazed and goggle-eyed not only at the Homerolexic infant; he is goggling as only a man can goggle who has applied Occam's razor to syllables all his life. He looks at me and asks if he can sit down.

The train pulls into Embankment. I shout, "No Exit!" and dart onto the platform, manhandling the pushchair.

L does the same, then dashes down the stairs marked NO EXIT. I follow my child, a

c. 1100 BC: China

STIMULUS CHECK

Tai Ren was the mother of King Wen and the second daughter of the Ren lineage of Zhi. Wang Ji took her as his consort. By nature Tai Ren was devoted, reverent, and unfailingly virtuous in her conduct. When she was with child, her eyes beheld no evil sights, her ears heard no perverse sounds, and her mouth uttered no careless words. She was able to teach her child in the womb. When she went to relieve herself in the privy over the pigpen, she gave birth to King Wen. At birth King Wen was brilliant and sagacious. When Tai Ren instructed him, from one of her precepts he was able to understand one hundred principles. In the end he founded the Zhou dynastic lineage.

A man of discernment would say that Tai Ren was adept at fetal instruction. In ancient times a woman with child did not lie on her side as she slept; neither would she sit sideways or stand on one foot. She would not eat food with odd flavors; if the food was cut awry, she would not eat it; if the mat was not placed straight, she would not sit on it. She did not let her eyes gaze on lewd sights or let her ears listen to depraved sounds. At night she ordered blind musicians to chant the *Odes*. She spoke only of proper things. In this way she gave birth to children of correct physical form who excelled others in talent and virtue. Thus during pregnancy one must always be cautious about external stimuli. If one is stimulated by something good, then the child will be good. If one is stimulated by something evil, then the child will be evil. People's resemblance to various things at birth is in every case due to the mother's being stimulated by external things, so that in form and voice they come to resemble these things.

Liu Xiang, *from* Exemplary Women of Early China. *Liu was born during the Western Han dynasty in what is now Jiangsu Province. In 26 BC he was appointed to lead a team of scholars collating ancient texts of philosophy and poetry from the imperial collection. His years of meticulous reconstructive work preserved important philosophical texts, including the work of the third-century-BC philosopher Xunzi. Liu is best known for his narrative collections relaying brief stories of China's moral paragons, some of whom were likely his own inventions.*

mother following her child. We lurk behind a corner until the train pulls out, then return to the platform and buy a couple of bags of peanuts.

Of course L has not been reading the *Odyssey* the whole time. The pushchair is also loaded with *White Fang*, *VIKING!*, *Tar-Kutu: Dog of the Frozen North*, *Marduk: Dog of the Mongolian Steppes*, *Pete: Black Dog of the Dakota*, *THE CARNIVORES*, *THE PREDATORS*, *THE BIG CATS*, and *The House at Pooh Corner*. For the past few days, he has also been reading *White Fang* for the third time. Sometimes we get off the train, and he runs up and down the platform. Sometimes he counts up to a hundred or so in one or more languages while eyes glaze up and down the car. Still he has been reading the *Odyssey* enough for a straw poll of Circle Line opinion on the subject of small children & Greek.

> *A college degree is a social certificate, not a proof of competence.*
>
> *—Elbert Hubbard, 1911*

Amazing: 7

Far too young: 10

Only pretending to read it: 6

Excellent idea as etymology so helpful for spelling: 19

Excellent idea as inflected languages so helpful for computer programming: 8

Excellent idea as classics indispensable for understanding of English literature: 7

Excellent idea as Greek so helpful for reading New Testament, camel through eye of needle for example mistranslation of very similar word for rope: 3

Terrible idea as study of classical languages embedded in educational system productive of divisive society: 5

Terrible idea as overemphasis on study of dead languages directly responsible for neglect of sciences and industrial decline and uncompetitiveness of Britain: 10

Stupid idea as he should be playing football: 1

Stupid idea as he should be studying Hebrew and learning about his Jewish heritage: 1

Marvelous idea as spelling and grammar not taught in schools: 24

(Respondents: 35; abstentions: 1,000?)

Oh, & almost forgot:

Marvelous idea as Homer so marvelous in Greek: 0

Marvelous idea as Greek such a marvelous language: 0

Oh & also:

Marvelous idea but how did you teach it to a child that young: 8

I once read somewhere that Sean Connery left school at the age of thirteen and later went on to read Proust and *Finnegans Wake*, and I keep expecting to meet an enthusiastic school leaver on the train, the type of person who only ever reads something because it is marvelous (and so hated school). Unfortunately, the enthusiastic school leavers are all minding their own business.

Faced with officious advice feel almost overwhelming temptation to say:

You know, I've been in a terrible *quandary* over this, I've been racking my brains for *weeks* trying to decide whether I was doing the right thing, finally this morning I thought—I know, I'll take the *Tube*, somebody on the Tube will be able to advise me, & sure enough you were able to tell me just what to do. Thank you *so* much, I don't know *what* I would have done if you hadn't come along—

So far I have been able to resist temptation 34 times out of 35. *Pas mal.*

When able to resist temptation, I say (which is perfectly true) that I never meant this to happen.

Helen DeWitt, *from* The Last Samurai. *DeWitt was born to American diplomats and grew up in Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, and Ecuador. She obtained a doctorate in Greek and Latin literature from Oxford before beginning work on this novel. Editors considering DeWitt's manuscript for publication complained that there was too much Greek and Japanese. The narrator, a single mother raising her child the way John Stuart Mill's father raised him, comes "close to solipsistic madness," James Wood wrote in 2018, with "a mind running at a higher temperature than ours."*

c. 1933: Yuma, AZ

HOMEROOM

I never liked school. They made me go, so I went, but they always had to push me to go. It wasn't the learning I hated but the conflicts. The teachers were very mean. I also didn't like sitting in the classroom. I was bored to death. I'd just go to sleep. Once, the teacher even sent a note home saying I was ill, that I had to be taken to the doctor because I was always falling asleep.

Every day it was the same routine. We got up pretty early, and I did several hours' work getting water from the canal, taking care of the animals, gathering eggs, the usual hard work on a farm. Then I had to get ready, wash myself, and comb my hair. I didn't like to comb it, and I didn't like to wear shoes. Now I can't walk without them, my soles are too tender, but it didn't bother me then. I wore them only for school. The moment I got out of the schoolyard, I'd take my shoes off and put them over my shoulder, leave them someplace, and I couldn't remember in the morning where I had dropped them. I would leave for school, forget something, and come back. Mother would say, "Come on, it's late!" and I'd go and come back again. I was late most of the time.

It was very cold, too, in winter, dropping below freezing at night. Those icy, dry winds bit viciously, and going to school on those cold mornings was painful. We didn't have warm clothing, and the piercing winds sliced through us like a scythe through grass. We would go from our home to our aunt's house and try to warm up a bit. Then on to our uncle's house, where we would try to thaw out before dashing to our cousin's house, and then to the school, which was down in the valley a good mile from our house. Every stop seemed to make the next lap colder, more cutting. In class our faces and hands would sting, then tingle for a while. Luckily the sun always routed the cold, and we would soon forget how we had shivered.

The school, which had three classrooms, was a tall, old wooden building in the shape of a T. Inside were old desks with initials carved all over, mostly those of my older cousins. When the bell rang, about two hundred students lined up on the walkway between the tamarack trees and marched in to the desks. That bell, mounted in a small belfry on top of the peaked roof, sounded like a church bell across the valley, and my favorite sound was the last toll. They'd say, "Dismissed," and I'd just get up and start running.

Courtyard of the Ben Youssef Madrassa, Marrakech, Morocco. Photograph by Manuel Cohen.





Limestone statuette of a temple boy, Cyprus, c. 325 BC.

In class one of my biggest problems was the language. Of course, we bitterly resented not being able to speak Spanish, but they insisted that we had to learn English. They said that if we were American, then we should speak the language, and if we wanted to speak Spanish, we should go back to Mexico.

When we spoke Spanish, the teacher swooped down on us. I remember the ruler whistling through the air as its edge came down sharply across my knuckles. It really hurt. Even out in the playground, speaking Spanish brought punishment. The principal had a special paddle that looked like a two-by-four with a handle on it. The wood was smooth from a lot of use. He would grab us, even the girls, put our head between his legs, and give it to us.

But I could take the spanking. What was worse was mispronouncing a word or making a grammatical mistake. With my Spanish accent and background, I couldn't avoid that. I'd get embarrassed, and that hurt more than the paddling. Some teachers were really cruel, while a few—a very few—were understanding.

It's a terrible thing when you have your own language and customs, and those are shattered. I remember trying to find out who I was and not being able to understand. Once, for instance, I recall saying I was a Mexican. The teacher was quick to correct me. "Oh, no, don't say that!" she said. But what else could I say? In a nice way she said, "You are an American. All of us are Americans," and she gave me a long explanation I couldn't understand. I went home and told my mother, "Mama, they tell me I'm an American!" To me an American was a white man. My mother couldn't really give me a satisfactory answer either. She said I was a citizen, but I didn't know what a citizen meant. It was too complicated.

Yet it was not something that I could dismiss or forget. There were too many reminders, too many times I would be called a Mexican in tones of ridicule or contempt.

Cesar Chavez, *from* Cesar Chavez: Autobiography of La Causa, *which the journalist Jacques Levy wrote after spending several years interviewing the labor leader. After losing their Arizona ranch during the Great Depression, Chavez's family began to travel around California seeking seasonal agricultural work. Chavez attended about thirty schools, some for just a day or two, before dropping out in the eighth grade. "We couldn't keep our shoes dry at night," he says elsewhere in this book. "Going to school without shoes was an ordeal."*

c. 540: Monte Cassino

GUIDANCE COUNSELOR

To be worthy of being in charge of a monastery, the abbot must always bear in mind what his title signifies and live up to the name of "superior." And so the abbot should not teach or decree or command anything contrary to the Lord's instructions. Instead he should work into the minds of his disciples the Lord's commands and his teaching as if they were the yeast of divine justice. The abbot must never forget that at the dread judgment of God, he will have to give an account of his teaching and of his disciples' obedience. The abbot must be aware that the shepherd will bear the blame for whatever deficiencies the sheep's owner might find in them. However, if the shepherd has focused all his efforts on his restless and disobedient flock and has been very careful to correct their bad behavior, then he will be acquitted at the Lord's judgment and will say to the Lord in the words of the prophet, "I have not hidden your justice in my heart. I have spoken your truth and your salvation, but they have despised and rejected me." And so in the end the disobedient sheep entrusted to his care will be punished by a devastating death.

The abbot should manage his disciples by teaching them in two ways: he ought to display all that is good and holy in his actions as much as in his words. In this way he will use words to teach the more able disciples the commands of the Lord, while to those who are stubborn and less intellectually sophisticated, he will demonstrate the Lord's teaching by means of his own actions. He should indicate by his actions that everything he tells his disciples to be against the Lord's teaching is to be avoided, so that he is not found guilty of failing to practice what he preaches. He must not show any favoritism in the monastery. He ought not to love one more than another, unless he finds one to be better in good deeds and in obedience. A person who is born free should not be accorded higher status than one who was a slave, unless other reasonable grounds exist for this. He should also be aware that it is a difficult and demanding task to guide souls and to manage many different temperaments, using encouragement to deal with one person, rebuke with another, persuasion with a

Girls jumping rope at the Chuxi village primary school, Fujian, 2014. Photograph by Michael Yamashita.





Kit's Writing Lesson, by Robert Braithwaite Martineau, 1852.

third, according to the disposition and understanding of each one. He must adapt himself to all in such a way that he does not lose any of the flock entrusted to him but may even rejoice to find that his flock is a good one and that it has increased in number.

The brothers' meals should always be accompanied by reading, not by a person at random who just picks up the book but by someone who will read for the whole week, starting on a Sunday. After Mass and Communion, the one who is starting his period of duty should ask all the brothers to pray for him, so that God may preserve him from a spirit of pride, and then everyone in the oratory should repeat this verse after him three times, "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will show forth your praise." Then he will receive a blessing and start reading. There must be complete silence and no whispering, so that only the reader's voice can be heard in the room. The brothers should supply one another with what they need while they are eating and drinking, so that no one needs to ask for anything. If, however, anything is required, it should be requested by some sign rather than by words. Unless a superior wants to give a few words of explanation, no one should venture to ask any questions about the reading or anything else, in case this encourages talking. The brother who is reading for the week should receive a little to eat and drink before he begins to read, because of Holy Communion, and so that he does not find it too difficult to wait for his food. Afterward he should take his meal with the kitchen workers and attendants of the week. Not all the brothers should take turns to read or sing—only those who are worth listening to.

Saint Benedict, *from* The Rule of Benedict. *Born in a small town in central Italy, Benedict abandoned his studies around 500, disenchanted with Roman culture, and moved to the mountains to become a hermit. His reputation as a holy man spread, and a community of monks and abbots gathered around him before he moved to Monte Cassino, where he finished writing this text. In 1964, celebrating the restored monastery at Monte Cassino, Pope Paul VI declared Benedict to be a "messenger of peace," a "herald of the religion of Christ," and the patron saint of Europe.*

1960: London

LOVE OF LIFE

We usually give a quite unwarranted importance to our children's scholastic performance. And this is nothing but a respect for the little virtue "success." It should be enough for us that they do not lag too far behind the others, that they do not fail their exams; but we are not content with this; we want success from them, we want them to satisfy our pride. If they do badly at school or simply not as well as we would wish, we immediately raise a barrier of nagging dissatisfaction between us and them; when we speak to them, we assume the sulky, whining tone of someone complaining about an insult. And then our children become bored and distance themselves from us. Or we support them in their complaints that the teachers have not understood them, and we pose as victims with them. And every day we correct their homework and study their lessons with them. In fact, school should be from the beginning the first battle that a child fights for himself, without us; from the beginning it should be clear that this is his battlefield and that we can give him only very slight and occasional help there. And if he suffers from injustice there or is misunderstood, it is necessary to let him see that there is nothing strange about this, because in life we have to expect to be constantly misunderstood and misinterpreted, and to be victims of injustice; and the only thing that matters is that we do not commit injustices ourselves. We share the successes and failures of our children because we love them, but just as much and in the same way that they, little by little as they grow up, share our successes and failures, our joys and anxieties. It is not true that they have a duty to do well at school for our sake and to give the best of their skills to studying. Once we have started them in their lessons, their duty is simply to go forward. If they wish to spend the best of their skills on things outside school—collecting coleoptera or learning Turkish—that is their business, and we have no right to reproach them, or to show that our pride has been hurt or that we feel dissatisfied with them. If at the moment the best of their skills do not seem to be applied to anything, then we do not have the right to shout at them very much in that case either; who knows, perhaps what seems laziness to us is really a kind of daydreaming and thoughtfulness that will bear fruit tomorrow? If it seems they are wasting the best of their energies and skills lying on the sofa reading ridiculous novels or charging around a football pitch, then again we cannot know whether this is really a waste of energy and skill or whether tomorrow this, too, will bear fruit in some way that we have not yet suspected. Because there is an infinite number of possibilities open to the spirit. But we, the parents, must not let ourselves be seized by a terror of failure. Our remonstrances must be like a squall of wind or a sudden storm—violent, but quickly forgotten—and not anything that could upset the nature of our relationship with our children, that could muddy its clarity and peace. We are there to console our children if they are hurt by failure; we are there to give them courage if they are humiliated by failure. We are also there to bring them down a peg or two when success has made them too pleased with themselves. We are there to reduce school to its narrow, humble limits; it is not something that can mortgage their future; it is simply a display of offered tools, from which it is perhaps possible to choose one that will be useful tomorrow.

> *It is nothing short of a miracle that modern methods of instruction have not yet entirely strangled the holy curiosity of inquiry.*
> *—Albert Einstein, 1949*

What we must remember above all in the education of our children is that their love of life should never weaken. This love can take different forms, and sometimes a listless, solitary, bashful child is not lacking in a love of life, he is not overwhelmed by a fear of life, he is simply in a state of expectancy, intent on preparing himself for his vocation. And what is a human being's

How to Qualify for an Imperial Chinese Civil-Service Exam

From the medieval Song dynasty until the late Qing reforms of 1905, aspiring imperial Chinese bureaucrats had to pass a series of increasingly challenging tests to be considered for an esteemed government position. The first major hurdle was the yuan-shih, *an annual examination to determine which students in each province would be allowed to advance to the next stage of the qualifying process.*

1. The provincial director of studies arrives several days before the exam and delivers a public lecture on the Confucian classics.

2. The morning of the exam, candidates assemble in front of the examination hall and are inspected for forbidden materials, such as cheat sheets and bribe money.

3. Candidates enter the hall in groups of twenty and bow before the prefect. Guarantors verify each candidate's identity, and papers are handed out.

4. Candidates find their assigned seats and write their names on removable labels torn from their exam booklets. To ensure fair grading, candidates and their answer sheets are now identified only by seat number.

5. The exam begins. Candidates have two hours to answer the first question, on the topic of the Confucian classics.

6. Candidates are given a second question on the Confucian classics and are asked to compose a poem on a given theme.

7. Around one or two PM, clerks announce that it is time to prepare clean copies.

8. Around three or four PM, clerks announce that it is time to start submitting.

9. When a candidate is ready to submit, he hands in his paper, receives an exit pass made of bamboo, and waits by the gates. Once fifty candidates have assembled, the group is permitted to leave, accompanied by three cannon shots.

10. The last departure takes place around five PM. Candidates who have not finished receive INCOMPLETE stamps on their papers.

11. Two days later, results are announced by seat number. Students who earn high enough scores begin the second session, and the process repeats for the third and fourth sessions.

12. After a ceremonial procession, the prefect posts examination results in the great hall of the temple of Confucius within the school compound.

13. Successful candidates meet with the director to express gratitude, and congratulatory announcements are sent to inform their families that they have been admitted to the district school to continue their studies.



Minerva Teaching the Art of Sculpture to the People of Rhodes, by René-Antoine Houasse, 1689.

vocation but the highest expression of his love of life? And so we must wait, next to him, while his vocation awakens and takes shape. His behavior can be like that of a mole, or of a lizard that holds itself still and pretends to be dead but in reality it has detected the insect that is its prey and is watching its movements and then suddenly springs forward. Next to him, but in silence and a little aloof from him, we must wait for this leap of his spirit. We should not demand anything; we should not ask or hope that he is a genius or an artist or a hero or a saint; and yet we must be ready for everything; our waiting and our patience must compass the possibility of both the highest and the most ordinary of fates.

A vocation, an ardent and exclusive passion for something in which there is no prospect of money, the consciousness of being able to do something better than others, and being able to love this thing more than anything else—this is the only, the unique way in which a rich child can completely escape being conditioned by money, so that he is free of its claims, so that he feels neither the pride nor the shame of wealth when he is with others. He will not even be conscious of what clothes he is wearing, or of the clothes around him, and tomorrow he will be equal to any privation, because the one hunger and thirst within him will be his own passion that will have devoured everything futile and provisional and divested him of every habit learned in childhood, and which alone will rule his spirit. A vocation is man's one true wealth and salvation.

Natalia Ginzburg, *from* The Little Virtues. *Using the pseudonym Alessandra Tornimparte, Ginzburg published her first book,* The Road to the City, *at the age of twenty-six after her friend Cesare Pavese wrote her a postcard telling her to "stop having children and write a book that is better than mine." Twenty years later Ginzburg dedicated this 1962 collection of previously published work to Pavese. "He is not present in any of these essays," she wrote in the foreword, "nevertheless he is the person to whom most of them are secretly addressed."*



STORY TIME

2021: Virginia

WHAT GARRETT EPPS LEARNED IN SCHOOL

Virginia Republican gubernatorial candidate Glenn Youngkin has decided that next month's off-year election is a referendum on something called critical race theory. CRT, he says, is a sinister force working to divide Americans by injecting race issues into education. "To judge one another based on the content of our character, not the color of our skin," he told a rally in Ashburn, Virginia, in September, "means we're going to ban critical race theory."

It is fashionable these days for progressives like myself to sneer at the hue and cry against critical race theory in the schools. But let's get real: some textbooks taught to Virginia children have contained virulent antiwhite propaganda.

Consider this passage from a Virginia public school textbook: "From the first recorded landing of Negroes at Jamestown in 1619 until the end of the colonial period, Virginia opposed a mixed population of the two races," it says. "Above all, the colony was determined to preserve the racial purity of the whites. This determination is the foundation upon which Virginia's handling of the racial issue rests, and has always rested."

Can we at least agree that such divisive rhetoric should not be allowed in schools? It can have bad effects. I know because the passage above, along with a lot of other racist bilge, was taught to me in 1961 in a state-mandated elementary school course in Virginia history; the textbook from which that quote comes, *A Hornbook of Virginia History*, edited by J.R.V. Daniel, was published in 1949 by the Virginia State Library for use in schools.

Youngkin and I are (as we don't say in the South) *paisan*—I grew up in Richmond, and he is from Norfolk. He is younger than I, but similar state-sponsored textbooks were

Boy in a village school, Odisha, India, 1970. Photograph by James P. Blair.

used at different grade levels until 1972—the year Youngkin would have entered school—and longer in some places. The bad effects are still being felt—and indeed, some of the rage against CRT comes from people who as children absorbed, from textbooks or teachers, the commonwealth's official creed of racism.

The original "crits"—the first to see everything in American history through the lens of race—were Southern whites themselves, who were proud to espouse the superiority of the white race and made sure that no schoolbook or teacher was permitted to question it.

One Youngkin supporter told the *Washington Post* that CRT is "just such a focus on race. My children weren't raised that way. I wasn't raised that way. We have friends of every religion, creed. They're well traveled. They just don't view the world through that lens. And I think it is so unfortunate and sad and so divisive for anybody to put that lens in front of them."

It's the educated barbarian who is the worst: he knows what to destroy.

—Helen MacInnes, 1963

That brings up two points: First, politicians (and even some newspeople) are using the term *critical race theory* the way Vizzini in *The Princess Bride* uses the word *inconceivable*. They seem to think it means something like "Trotskyites," whose malice Stalinists blamed for every shortcoming of the Five-Year Plan. It does not even mean "every use of the concept of race in history classes that might make an older white person uncomfortable," which appears to be what Youngkin means by it. In fact, its use in politics was originated by a right-wing "journalist" looking for a handy weapon to attack any attempts to combat racism in education and the workplace.

In thirty years as a legal academic, I got to know CRT and its proponents well. I have read many papers and attended many academic panels where their views are presented. I found some electrifying and others to be over-the-counter sleep aids. CRT is an academic movement, born in law schools, with all the virtues and limitations that name implies. It has a lot to offer, and it generates some very interesting disagreements among people who take the trouble to learn what it is. What it is *not* is a disease or a conspiracy hovering behind any teacher or book that suggests that racism is a problem in the twenty-first century.

The second point is that even if critical race theory were exerting some massive influence on K–12 education in America (it isn't), and even if critical race theory had as its aim the instilling of shame in white students (it doesn't), none of its efforts would compare in scope and determination with the systematic and successful seventy-five-year campaign by Virginia and other Southern states to control what was taught to students, and what students, black and white, were allowed to read and think about race and racism. When we consider Virginia parents complaining that they "weren't raised that way," this history needs to be considered.

In fact, a rigorous program of ideological conformity has been a part of Southern culture since the 1831 Nat Turner rebellion in Virginia. On the excuse of preventing more slave revolts, not only were antebellum schools and universities purged of antislavery teachers and books, the very mails were censored to ensure that no antislavery publications reached Dixie. The historian Clement Eaton christened this process of ideological purification "the intellectual blockade," and it survived intact at least until Appomattox.

The blockade briefly fell after the Civil War, but as the historian Fred Arthur Bailey of Abilene Christian University wrote twenty years ago in "Textbooks of the 'Lost Cause,'" the Sons of Confederate Veterans and the United Daughters of the Confederacy, newly energized by the triumph of Jim Crow, began a successful campaign during the 1890s to require the teaching of "state histories" written by neo-Confederates. These textbooks explained that slavery was a benign system, that secession was legal and justified, that the Confederacy's Lost Cause was noble, and that Confederate leaders were American patriots.

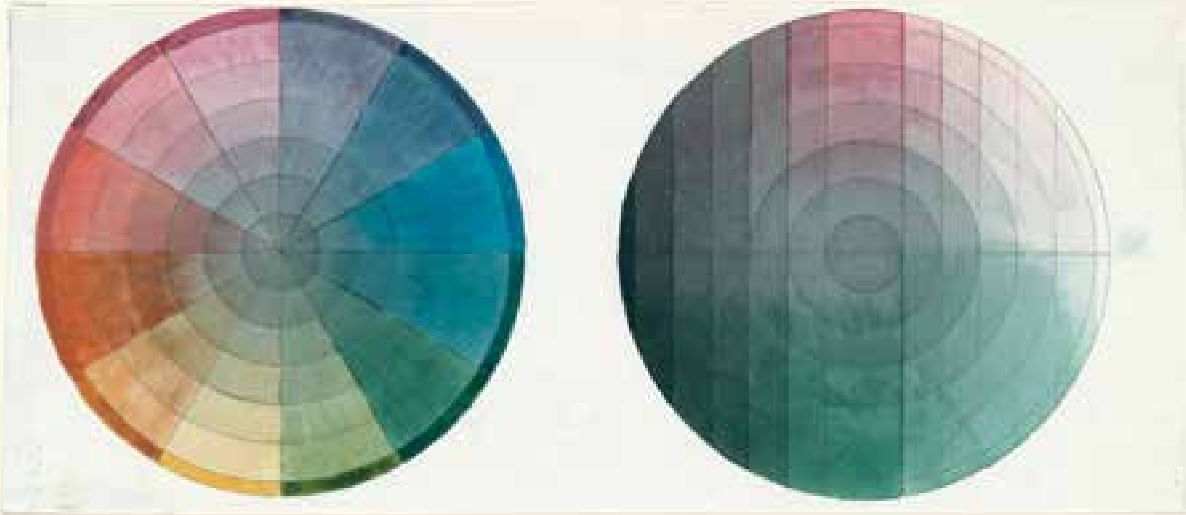
But eternal vigilance is the price of racial conformity. In 1948, a few weeks after President Harry Truman announced a modest federal civil rights program, Southern leaders began to worry anew whether schoolchildren were learning the proper attitudes toward race and the South. In Richmond legislators created the Virginia History and Textbook Commission. That commission was dominated by segregationist politicians—most prominently including state senator Garland Gray. (Gray, a Southside planter, a few years later would chair another state commission, this one studying *Brown v. Board of Education*. That "Gray Commission" would recommend a voucher plan under which no white student would be required to attend a school with black children.)

The Textbook Commission ordered (and extensively edited, rewrote, and censored) its own set of textbooks, whose use was required in schools. These textbooks, only slightly revised in 1964, weren't "withdrawn" by the State Board of Education until 1972; even after that, as the William and Mary history professor Carol Sheriff explained in 2012, some school systems defiantly continued their use.

One of the three, *Virginia's History and Geography*, explained that the Lost Cause was inspired by state's rights and pure altruism: "Virginians love the United States and did not want to leave it. But Virginians wanted people in every state to have their rights." After the war, it said, "Robert E. Lee, because of his greatness, his bravery, and his love for Virginia, would always be a hero." Another, *Virginia: History, Government, Geography*, explained that slavery "made it possible for the Negroes to come to America and make contacts with civilized life." They were lucky to live "far away from the spears and war clubs of enemy tribes" in Africa. Plantation life was "happy and prosperous." True, there was a teeny, tiny bit of whipping, but "whipping was also the usual method of correcting children," and anyway, "all slaves were given medical care."

The School, by Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo, 1791.





Cross and longitudinal sections of a color sphere, by Philipp Otto Runge, 1810.

A third, *Cavalier Commonwealth: History and Government of Virginia*, explained that Virginia's slave masters "regarded themselves as benefactors of a backward race," and "indeed in some respects they obviously were." Slaves were given "plentiful food…warm cabins, leisure, and free health care."

Finally, the book I quoted at the outset, *A Hornbook of Virginia History*, told students: "The debt the Negro race owes to Virginia and the South has never been less recognized than it is today. Virginia took a backward race of savages, part cannibal, civilized it, developed many of its best qualities."

Please remember: These textbooks were prepared by a state commission using tax dollars and taught in public schools in courses students were *required by law* to attend—black students as well as white. Parents worried about how textbooks will affect white students need to cope with the fact that three generations of black students were subjected to these books.

The issue is not whether Youngkin read these books as a student; it is that he and I both grew up white and privileged in a society profoundly shaped by this shameful state-imposed racial ideology. Many of my teachers—and undoubtedly many of those who taught Youngkin at his tony prep school, Norfolk Academy—believed implicitly in these myths, spoke of them often, and would not tolerate dissent from them.

In other words, we were "raised that way." And the moral stature of the Youngkins of the world to invoke Martin Luther King as a way to shut down racial dialogue is, shall we say, slight.

In fact, the entire hue and cry against CRT is not about ending division; it is about preserving it. It is not about racial reconciliation; it is about inspiring racial panic, of the kind that swept the South in the 1830s, the 1890s, and the 1950s. That this phony scare is active in states outside the South is a sign of the success the conservative movement has achieved in exporting the religious, political, and racial values of the South to states in the heartland. It is no longer only in the old Confederacy that questioning of the racial order is seen as next to treason.

Glenn Youngkin is simply the latest in a line of mountebanks willing to stir race hatred and fear to gain power.

He knows how it is done; like me, he learned it in school.

From "Want to Know More About Critical Race Theory?," an article that ran in Washington Monthly *the month before Youngkin was elected governor. Some credited Youngkin's upset victory in part to his focus on education. On the day he was sworn in, Youngkin fulfilled a campaign pledge by signing an executive order calling for a ban on "the use of inherently divisive concepts, including Critical Race Theory," in schools. He went on to open a confidential tip line for parents to report such teaching, to "help us be aware of…their child being denied their rights that parents have."*

c. 1980: Vienna

MUSIC ACADEMY

What else can she do but become a teacher? A difficult step for a master pianist, who is suddenly confronted with stammering freshmen and soulless seniors. Conservatories and academies, as well as private teachers, patiently accept a lot of students who really belong on a garbage dump or, at best, a soccer field. Many young people are still driven to art, as in olden times. Most of them are driven by their parents, who know nothing about art—only that it exists. And they're so delighted that it exists! Of course, art turns many people away, for there has to be a limit. The limits between the gifted and the ungifted. Erika, as a teacher, is delighted to draw that limit. Selecting and rejecting make up for a lot. After all, she was once treated like a goat and separated from the sheep. Erika's students are a coarsely diverse mixture, and none of them has ever been really tested or tasted. One seldom finds a red rose among them. Occasionally, during the first year, Erika manages to wrest a Clementi sonata from one or two students, while others still grunt and root about in Czerny's elementary études. These students are then discarded after the intermediary examination, because they can't find the wheat and they can't find the chaff, even though their parents are firmly convinced that their children will soon feast on nectar and ambrosia.

Erika's mixed joys are the good advanced students, who make an effort. She can wrest all sorts of things from them: Schubert sonatas, Schumann's *Kreisleriana*, Beethoven sonatas, those high points in the life of a piano student. The work tool, a Bösendorfer, excretes an intricate blend. And next to it stands the teacher's Bösendorfer, which only Erika can play, unless two students are practicing a piece for two pianos.

After three years the piano student has to enter the next level; to do so he must pass an exam. Most of the work for this exam is assigned to Erika; she has to take the idling student engine and step on the gas, slam down hard in order to rev it up. Sometimes the engine doesn't really catch, it would rather be doing something else, something that has little to do with music—for instance, pouring melodious words into a girl's ear. Erika doesn't care for such behavior; she tries to stop it whenever she can. Often, before an exam, Erika sermonizes: fluffing a note, she says, isn't as bad as rendering a piece in the wrong spirit, a spirit that does not do justice to it. She is preaching to deaf ears, which have been closed by fear. For many of her students, music means climbing from the depths of the working class to the heights of artistic cleanliness. Later on they, too, will become piano teachers. They are afraid that when they play at the examination, their sweaty, fear-filled fingers, driven by a swifter pulse beat, will slip to the wrong keys. Erika can talk a blue streak about interpretation, but the only thing the students wish to do is play the piece correctly to the end.

> *One must love people a good deal whom one takes pains to convince or instruct.*
> *—Mary de la Riviere Manley, 1720*

Erika likes thinking about Walter Klemmer, a nice-looking blond boy, who lately has been the first to show up in the morning and the last to leave in the evening. A busy beaver, Erika must admit. He is a student at the Engineering Academy, where he is learning all about electricity and its beneficial features. Recently he has been listening to all the music students, from the first hesitant picking and pecking to the final crack of Chopin's Fantasy in F Minor, op. 49. He seems to have a lot of time on his hands, which is rather unlikely for a student in the final phase of his studies. One day Erika asks him whether he wouldn't rather practice Schoenberg, instead of lounging around so unproductively. Doesn't he have any studying to do? No lectures, no drills, nothing? He says he's on his semester break, which hadn't occurred to Erika, although she teaches so many students. Vacation at the music academy doesn't coincide with vacation at

the university. Strictly speaking, there are no holidays for art; art pursues you everywhere, and that's just fine with the artist.

Erika is surprised: How come you always show up here so early, Herr Klemmer? If a student is working on Schoenberg's 33b, as you are, he can't possibly be interested in minor frivolities. So why do you listen to the others? The hardworking student lies. He says you can profit from anything and everything, no matter how little it may be. You can learn a lesson from just about anything, says this con man, who has nothing better to do. He claims he can get something from even the least of his brothers, so long as he remains curious and thirsty for knowledge. Except that you have to overcome those minor things in order to get further. A student can't stay with the losers, otherwise his superiors will interfere.

Besides, the young man likes listening to his teacher perform, even if it's just singsong, tralala, or the B major scale. Don't start flattering your old teacher, Herr Klemmer. But he replies that she's not old, and he's not "flattering" her. I really mean every word I say, it comes from the bottom of my heart! Sometimes this nice-looking boy asks for a favor, extra homework, he'd like to practice something extra, because he's overzealous. He gazes expectantly at his teacher, hoping for a hint, lying in wait for a pointer. His teacher, on her high horse, cuts the young man down to size when she sneers: You still don't know the Schoenberg all that well. The student enjoys being in the hands of such a teacher, even when she looks down at him while holding the reins tightly.

Elfriede Jelinek, *from* The Piano Teacher. *Jelinek studied at the Vienna Conservatory, where this novel is set, and at the University of Vienna. In 2004 she was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature; due to her agoraphobia, she submitted a prerecorded acceptance speech rather than attend in person. "Language, which in motion, in speaking, appeared to be a safe shelter, turns against me," she said in it. "No wonder. I mistrusted it immediately, after all. What kind of camouflage is that which exists not to make one invisible but ever more distinct?"*

The Exam Room, by Cyril Edward Power, c. 1934.



1177: Mount Hiei

LOST TIME

Now, His Cloistered Eminence had been receiving from Koken,
a great prelate of Miidera, instruction in the Shingon mysteries.
Koken had taught him the essence of the three major esoteric sutras—
the Dainichi-kyo, the Kongocho-kyo, and the Soshitsuji-kyo—
and on the fourth of the ninth month
the sovereign's formal initiation was to take place at Miidera.
The monks of Mount Hiei were furious.
"From the very beginning," they said,
"initiations and ordinations have always been the prerogative of our Mountain.
Such has been the established rule.
After all, that is the very purpose of our Sanno Deity's teaching.
If this initiation takes place at Miidera nonetheless,
we will burn Miidera to the ground!"
His Cloistered Eminence understood the need for discretion.
After finishing his preparations, he gave up the idea.
So it was that he took Koken with him to Tennoji,
where he built a subtemple named Chiko-in.
Having elevated the Tennoji well water to "wisdom water of the five sacral jars,"
he accomplished at this hallowed spot, where the Buddha's word first sounded in Japan,
the initiation of the Consecrated Teacher.

> The cloistered sovereign had, after all, forgone initiation at Miidera in order to calm the uproar on the Mountain. Nonetheless, the scholar-monks and the temple rank and file remained at odds with one another and fought repeatedly. The scholar-monks lost every time. Doom seemed to threaten Mount Hiei, and crisis the court. Properly, the rank and file were either youths who had served the scholars and then become the simplest kind of monk, or worker-monks half-clerical and half-lay. Since the time of Kakujin, the Kongoju-in abbot, such men of the Three Pagodas of the Mountain had turn by turn provided flowers for the altars, under the rubric of "summer retreat support." Known in more recent years as "practitioners," they had come to despise the full-fledged monks and had defeated them in recurring skirmishes. They ignored their masters' orders and plotted war. The monks proper appealed to the senior nobles to suppress the practitioners immediately, and the senior nobles reported their appeal to the warrior hierarchy.

So it came to pass that Kiyomori,
armed with a decree from the cloistered sovereign,
dispatched one Muneshige from the province of Kii,
at the head of two thousand men from the inner provinces,
to join forces with the monks proper against the practitioners.



Training a Magpie, by Alessandro Magnasco, early eighteenth century.

The practitioners' established base was the Toyo lodge,
but now they went down to the Sanga estate in Omi,
raised a large force, climbed back up the Mountain,
and entrenched themselves in a fortress on Soizaka.
  That same ninth month, on the twentieth day,
  early in the hour of the dragon,
  monks to the number of three thousand
  and two thousand imperial horsemen—
  in all a force of a full five thousand—
  bore down upon Soizaka.
  Certain that victory was theirs
  this time at last, the monks preferred
  to have the imperial troops go before them,
  while the latter deferred to the monks.

Being so much at cross-purposes,
neither could put up much of a fight.
Stones catapulted from the fort
killed nearly all of them, on both sides.
The practitioners had recruited
ne'er-do-wells of every description:
thieves from provinces hither and yon,
armed robbers and mountain bandits,
even pirates, inflamed with greed
and with only contempt for their lives.
Every one fought like a man possessed,
and this time, too, the scholars lost.
Thereafter Mount Hiei simply fell to pieces.
Apart from the Twelve Perpetual Chanters,
only rare monks continued to live there.
In valley after valley, the preaching lapsed;
in lodge after lodge, devoted practice died.
The windows of sacred learning closed;
meditation seats remained unclaimed.
Nothing the Buddha taught throughout his life
now gave forth its fragrance of spring flowers.
Clouds veiled the autumn moon of the Three Truths.
Nobody upheld the lamp of the Teaching,
lit three hundred years ago and more,
and smoke that once rose from incense
burning through the hours seemed gone for good.
Imposing temple halls towered aloft,
three-tiered, into the blue empyrean;
roof- and crossbeams pierced the sky
until the rafters vanished into mist.
But now only winds from off the peaks
tended gilded images spattered with rain.
The moon's soaring light shone through cracked eaves.
Dawn bejeweled with dewdrops lotus thrones.
Such are the evils of this latter age
that, in all Three Lands, the Buddha's Teaching
by slow degrees has fallen very low.

From The Tale of the Heike. *This medieval epic about the political and military rivalry of the Taira and the Minamoto clans originated as a set of folktales that developed between 1190 and 1221 and, according to the fourteenth-century poet and essayist Yoshida Kenko, were compiled in the middle of the thirteenth century by a former court scholar named Yukinaga, who trained a blind bard to recite the tale to the accompaniment of a* biwa *lute. After generations of oral transmission, the epic circulated in written form only after 1371, when the elderly head of a line of Heike performers dictated it to a disciple.*

1909: Rome

BENCH PRESSED

That concept of liberty which must inspire pedagogy is universal. The biological sciences of the nineteenth century have shown it to us when they have offered us the means for studying life. If, therefore, the old-time pedagogy foresaw or vaguely expressed the principle of studying the pupil before educating him, and of leaving him free in his spontaneous manifestations, such an intuition, indefinite and barely expressed, was made possible of practical attainment only after the contribution of the experimental sciences during the last century. This is not a case for sophistry or discussion; it is enough that we state our point.

> *The educator must above all understand how to wait: to reckon all effects in the light of the future, not of the present.*
>
> *—Ellen Key, 1911*

He who would say that the principle of liberty informs the pedagogy of today would make us smile as at a child who, before a box of mounted butterflies, should insist that they were alive and could fly. The principle of slavery still pervades pedagogy, and therefore the same principle pervades the school. I need only give one proof—the stationary desks and chairs. Here we have, for example, striking evidence of the errors of early materialistic scientific pedagogy that, with mistaken zeal and energy, carried the barren stones of science to rebuilding the crumbling walls of the school.

The schools were at first furnished with long, narrow benches upon which children were crowded together. Then came science and perfected the bench. In this work much attention was paid to the recent contributions of anthropology. The age of the child and the length of his limbs were considered in placing the seat at the right height. The distance between seat and desk was calculated with infinite care, in order that the child's back should not become deformed, and finally the seats were separated and the width so closely calculated that the child could barely seat himself upon it, while to stretch himself by making any lateral movements was impossible. This was done in order that he might be separated from his neighbor. These desks are constructed in such a way as to render the child visible in all his immobility. One of the ends sought through this separation is the prevention of immoral acts in the schoolroom.

What shall we say of such prudence in a state of society where it would be considered scandalous to give voice to principles of sex morality in education, for fear we might thus contaminate innocence? And yet here we have science lending itself to this hypocrisy, fabricating machines! Not only this; obliging science goes further still, perfecting the benches in such a way as to permit to the greatest possible extent the immobility of the child, or, if you wish, to repress every movement of the child.

It is all so arranged that when the child is well fitted into his place, the desk and chair themselves force him to assume the position considered to be hygienically comfortable. The seat, the footrest, the desks are arranged in such a way that the child can never stand at his work. He is allotted only sufficient space for sitting in an erect position. It is in such ways that schoolroom desks and benches have advanced toward perfection. Every cult of the so-called scientific pedagogy has designed a model scientific desk. Not a few nations have become proud of their "national desk"—and in the struggle of competition, these various machines have been patented.

Undoubtedly, there is much that is scientific underlying the construction of these benches. Anthropology has been drawn upon in the measuring of the body and the diagnosis of the age; physiology, in the study of muscular movements; psychology, in regard to perversion of instincts; and, above all, hygiene, in the effort to prevent curvature of the spine. These desks were indeed scientific, following in their construction the anthropological study of the child.



Wooden school workbook, Egypt, c. 300 BC.

We have here, as I have said, an example of the literal application of science to the schools.

I believe that before very long we shall all be struck with great surprise by this attitude. It will seem incomprehensible that the fundamental error of the desk should not have been revealed earlier through the attention given to the study of infant hygiene, anthropology, and sociology, and through the general progress of thought. The marvel is greater when we consider that during the past years, there has been stirring in almost every nation a movement toward the protection of the child.

I believe that it will not be many years before the public, scarcely believing the descriptions of these scientific benches, will come to touch with wondering hands the amazing seats that were constructed for the purpose of preventing among our schoolchildren curvature of the spine!

It is incomprehensible that so-called science should have worked to perfect an instrument of slavery in the school without being enlightened by one ray from the movement of social liberation, growing and developing throughout the world. For the age of scientific benches was also the age of the redemption of the working classes from the yoke of unjust labor.

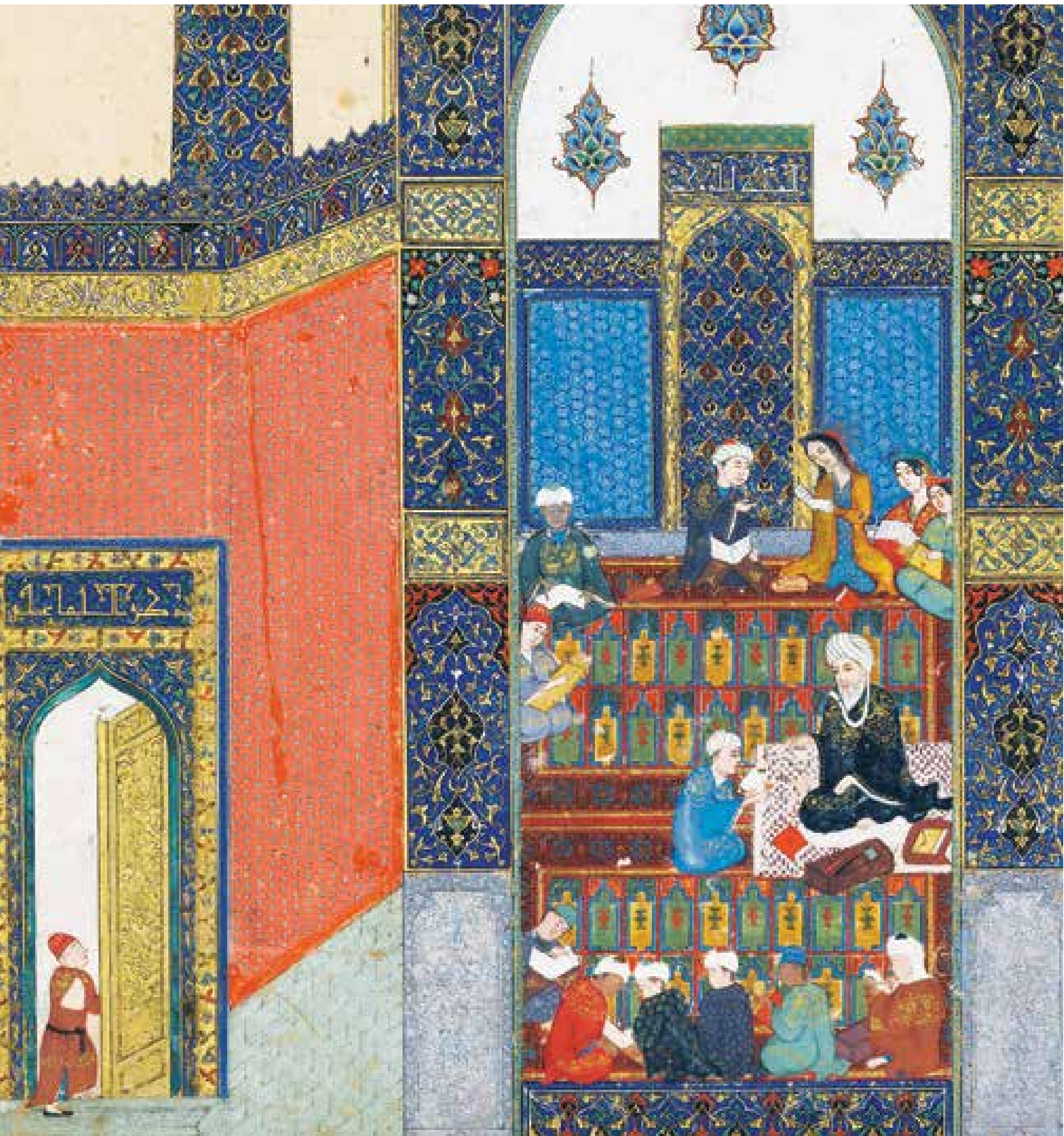
Maria Montessori, *from* The Montessori Method. *Despite pressure from her parents to become a teacher, Montessori became one of the first women in Italy to go to medical school. In the late 1890s, working as a physician with intellectually disabled children, she began to theorize that delinquency was caused by a lack of institutional support for children. Over the next few decades, she opened Montessori schools and training programs all over the world. In 1934 all the Montessori schools in Italy were closed after she refused to force teachers to pledge loyalty to the Fascist Party.*

1966: Beijing

PARTY LINE

In early June 1966, I came to school one morning and sensed an unusual atmosphere. A whole lot of eye-catching slogans had appeared on the outside walls, written in huge characters on colored paper. "Cut classes and take part in revolution!" "Down with the capitalist roaders in our school!" The large crowds standing in front of the slogans included many teachers, who said nothing and looked grave. Pupils talked or whispered, voicing their confusion, curiosity, or even excitement. From a distance I saw many more pupils, mostly from the senior middle school,

Laila and Majnun at School (detail), by Jafar Baisunghuri, c. 1431.



running in and out of different buildings wearing solemn expressions, as if with sacred errands to perform. Minutes later a number emerged and rushed toward the crowd. They put up more slogans and posters, with similar messages.

When the bell rang for school, not many pupils obeyed. I sat in the classroom with a handful of classmates while the tumult continued outside and wondered what came next. The building itself was quiet, apart from some footsteps hurrying through the empty corridor, but our teacher did not turn up. Suddenly, a boy looked in and shouted, "What are you waiting for? Come and join the rally and debate!"

The site of the rally was a strip of ground between the huge main teaching building and the dining hall, a valley between steep cliffs, jammed solid with pupils and staff. Standing on an island in the crowd formed by a table-tennis table acting as a temporary platform, a final-year pupil was finishing her speech, hoarsely shouting slogans through a microphone. "Be ready to die in defense of Chairman Mao's revolutionary line!" "Uncover the capitalist roaders in our school!"

The rally was organized and the speech making dominated by pupils in the senior middle school rather than by the school authority, and it soon became clear that the elected villain was Jiang Pei, secretary of the school party branch. To me this seemed unthinkable. Jiang Pei was in his early forties, a powerful figure, and deeply respected. He had started his career in his twenties, and supported the Communist Party when the Nationalists still ruled. In the past I had enjoyed listening to his humorous, knowledgeable speeches in the school's assemblies, so different from the dull style of other indoctrination authorities. Now all of a sudden, Jiang Pei was branded as the number one capitalist roader in our school.

Jiang Pei was accused in his absence of being an agent of the capitalist class, peddling the bourgeois revisionist line of education. In particular, he had promoted special trial classes in the liberal arts. By poisoning innocent pupils' minds with feudalist, capitalist, and revisionist ideas, he had tried to turn them into a bourgeois intellectual elite. Our school had been selected for the trial by the former municipal educational authority—proof of a counterrevolutionary connection with the former Municipal Party Committee. Other accusations included his preference for bourgeois intellectuals—in other words, well-qualified teachers with professional attainments.

The rally continued all day, but it was hardly a debate, since only a few spoke up for the school authorities, and those who did were often hissed off the platform midway through their speeches and the microphone snatched from their hands. "Shut up, you bourgeois royalists!" The heckling drowned out their voices as the mood grew more bad-tempered and the rally more chaotic. For a while no single speaker could be heard, and there was a free-for-all to reach the platform. Eventually, a final-year pupil jumped up. He seized the microphone and started to read a quotation from Mao Zedong's recent letter to Lin Biao, hot from big-character posters in Beijing University: "The term of education must be shortened, and a revolution launched in the educational field. The fact of having bourgeois intellectuals run our educational institutions must cease." His reading was answered by thunderous cheers and applause, while the few "bourgeois royalists" lost their voices.

> *The atmosphere of libraries, lecture rooms, and laboratories is dangerous to those who shut themselves up in them too long. It separates us from reality like a fog.*
>
> *—Alexis Carrel, 1950*

Many senior pupils at our school had visited Beijing University to learn from its revolutionary experiences. It was not difficult to start the fire of the Cultural Revolution on our campus. Spurred on by the official media, more and more pupils longed to strike a blow against the school authorities, and their craving to fight the class enemy was tinder waiting for a spark.

1258: Shiraz

GOOFUS AND GALLANT

A king gave a son of his to a teacher and said, "He is like your own son. Educate him as you would one of your own."

"I will obey," he replied.

For several years he strove but got nowhere. The teacher's own sons became paragons of learning and eloquence. The king took the scholar to task and rebuked him, saying, "You broke your promise and did not keep your word."

"Let it not be hidden from the mind of the lord of the face of the earth that the education was the same," he replied, "but the natures differed."

> Although both gold and silver come from rocks, there is not gold and silver in every rock.
> Canopus shines on all the world. In one place it produces fine suede and in another goat's leather.

Saadi, *from the* Gulistan. *Born around the turn of the thirteenth century to a family of religious scholars said to be descended from the Prophet Muhammad, Saadi studied at the* nezamiyeh *in Baghdad. After the Mongol invasion of Persia, he wandered through Anatolia, Syria, Egypt, and Iraq for thirty years, returning to Shiraz in 1256. In the two years that followed his return, he wrote the* Gulistan, *a collection of stories and personal anecdotes, and the* Bustan, *a verse work on Muslim virtues.*

After the rally almost every school official was denounced, and teaching stopped. When the pupils staged further rallies, they ended in further chaos. The campus teemed with slogans and big-character posters. In the early morning, its quietness was often broken by revolutionary music played by the pupils' own brass band, followed by broadcast indictments of the capitalist roaders, interspersed with more revolutionary music piped through loudspeakers till late evening. Soon senior pupils started to organize the juniors to join in. We were told that apart from Jiang Pei, the number one capitalist roader in our school, there were many more hidden class enemies who should be uncovered by the revolutionary masses. But where were they? No one could say. For more than ten years, China had been staging political campaigns, and those singled out as class enemies had been expelled from the educational field. In our school it was hard to find anyone with a suspect political record. Eventually, the focus of my class turned to Yu Zhen, our Chinese teacher.

In the past there had been gossip at school about Yu Zhen's eccentric personality and lifestyle. Though in his thirties, he was single, which was rare and drew attention. At work he dressed neatly, wore clean shirts, and kept his thick, dark hair well groomed, whereas most of his male colleagues paid little attention to their appearance. Except when teaching, Yu Zhen rarely spoke. Having no home in Beijing, he lived and slept in a small, dark room in a corner of the staff office building. His odd behavior always reminded me of a solitary mole in a cartoon film, but the more he tried to hide from the public, the more he drew others' attention. Various rumors claimed that Yu Zhen came from a wealthy business family in Shanghai, and that his unsociable personality was the mark left by a short-lived love affair many years ago. Someone else guessed that it might be political reasons that made him so inscrutable—he might be a survivor of the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957, and almost branded as a Bourgeois Rightist then. But no one I knew had any solid facts about his background.

Despite all the gossip, I was captivated by Yu Zhen's deep knowledge of Chinese language and literature. Listening to his teaching, I found to my surprise that his eyes could flash affectionately behind his dark-framed spectacles, and his voice become intense. What astonished me most was his beautiful left-handed writing. (His right hand was missing, which was another cause of campus speculation.) Under my father's influence, I believed that skill in calligraphy measured a person's education, which was an extra reason to respect Yu Zhen.

Yu Zhen's denunciation, prompted by his former pupils now in the senior middle school, was based on little more than hearsay, but that was enough in the prevailing mood. All over the campus, big-character posters and slogans condemned Yu Zhen as a "mouthpiece of the capitalist class." One poster asked him, "Where on

earth are you trying to lead your pupils?," which referred to his singing a Western love song at a party arranged by his pupils a few years ago, and thereby infecting their minds with bourgeois ideas. Smart clothes and combed hair were corroborating signs of an absolute bourgeois intellectual. But no matter how slashing the attacks, Yu Zhen never said a word in self-defense. Perhaps he believed that in times without justice, silence was the best way to survive.

In my class I was elected to draft big-character posters, because I had a way with words. Faced with that role, my responses were divided. Recently, I had felt like a fallen leaf, blown by the campus gale till I was lost. As if the world had changed, all the rules and principles that guided me before had been destroyed. From now on our only guidance was to follow where Chairman Mao pointed. When I first heard his call to fight the capitalist roaders, I was excited. Always proud of my family background, I pictured myself under a huge red flag, defending Chairman Mao's revolutionary headquarters shoulder to shoulder with my parents, and felt absolutely glorious. At the same time, I also felt confused, since it was unthinkable to convert familiar figures like Jiang Pei and Yu Zhen into rabid class enemies. Eventually, it was my faith in Chairman Mao that convinced me to oppose my teacher. Despite all my efforts, however, my words failed to sharpen the campaign: I could not create forceful posters. And soon my role was over.

Aiping Mu, *from* Vermilion Gate. *Born in 1951 to high-ranking intellectuals in the Chinese Communist Party, Mu was recruited as a Red Guard shortly after the start of the Cultural Revolution. Elsewhere in this memoir, which Mu published in 2000 after immigrating to England, she details how in 1969 she became one of an estimated seventeen million urban youths deemed at risk of bourgeois thought and relocated to remote rural areas. "It is very necessary," Mao wrote, "for the educated youth to go to the countryside and undergo reeducation by poor peasants."*

The American School, by Matthew Pratt, 1765.



1901: Chicago

OBVIOUS TRUTHS

Everything has a simple basis: the oak has its acorn. Our self-imposed task is thus to seek out the simple: to find broad explanations, satisfying solutions, reliable answers to those questions which affect the health and growth of that democracy under whose banner we live and hope. So we shall use our metaphysics and our philosophy in just this sense. They are to be our tools; we are to use them; they are not to burden us. For these processes mean, essentially, that in using the focusing powers of the mind, the extension of vision, the unseen becomes for

Choose Your Educator

An alignment chart of teachers from classic children's literature

	Lawful	Neutral	Chaotic
Good	**LAWFUL GOOD** **The Giver** **From** Lois Lowry's *The Giver* (1993) Burdened by the secrets of his seemingly utopian society, the elderly memory keeper known as the Giver helps his trainee, Jonas, escape to a freer future, but stays behind himself.	**NEUTRAL GOOD** **Miss Edmunds** **From** Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia* (1977) Learning that an impromptu trip to the National Gallery is the first time her student Jess has ever been to a museum, art teacher Miss Edmunds is overcome. "My life has been worthwhile after all," she says.	**CHAOTIC GOOD** **Ms. Frizzle** **From** Joanna Cole and Bruce Degen's Magic School Bus series (1985–2010) Ms. Frizzle teaches her students about the world with the help of a supernatural school bus. "Take chances," she advises, "make mistakes, and get messy!"
Neutral	**LAWFUL NEUTRAL** **Mr. Ratburn** **From** Marc Brown's Arthur series (1976–2011) Equal parts loved and feared by his students, Mr. Ratburn is known for giving the hardest tests but also for encouraging children.	**TRUE NEUTRAL** **Miss Wormwood** **From** Bill Watterson's *Calvin and Hobbes* (1985–95) "Miss Wormwood believes in the value of education," comic creator Watterson has said of hyperactive Calvin's first-grade teacher. "Needless to say she's an unhappy person."	**CHAOTIC NEUTRAL** **Haymitch Abernathy** **From** Suzanne Collins' Hunger Games series (2008–10) "Stay alive" is gruff coach Haymitch's only advice to protégés Katniss and Peeta as they prepare to fight to the death on live television.
Evil	**LAWFUL EVIL** **Dolores Umbridge** **From** J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003) A career bureaucrat turned Hogwarts professor, Umbridge quashes dissent by forcing students to write lines with a magic quill that uses blood instead of ink.	**NEUTRAL EVIL** **Miss Trunchbull** **From** Roald Dahl's *Matilda* (1988) "Nauseating little warts," Miss Trunchbull, the headmistress of Crunchem Hall, says as first grader Matilda and her classmates arrive at school, unaware that they will soon be sadistically punished for infractions such as wearing pigtails.	**CHAOTIC EVIL** **Mrs. Gorf** **From** Louis Sachar's *Sideways Stories from Wayside School* (1978) "If you children are bad," Mrs. Gorf tells her students, "I'll wiggle my ears, stick out my tongue, and turn you into apples!" By the end of the week, she has.

us the tangible, the unusual becomes the obvious, the uncommon becomes the familiar, and the subjective becomes the objective.

If you put an acorn in the ground, that acorn, containing the function oak, will seek the form oak and, in the process of time, will become an oak tree. So if I say that a certain function, aspirant democracy, is seeking a certain form of expression, democratic architecture, and will surely find it, I am making a statement that does not differ in essence from what I said concerning the acorn. It is as simple, as natural, as matter-of-fact. Now, I have no patience with those teachers who are more concerned in impressing their academic wealth upon the student than they are in exhibiting to him the simple basis of architectural phenomena and in making that basic principle clear and manageable. I am not tolerant of that aristocratic spirit which misdirects American youth in its search for knowledge—and would seek to impose upon it those formulas of learning and attitudes of mind toward learning that have descended to us from times when education was for the "gentleman"—for the few, for a class; that "education" which separates one from his people by the violence of its badge of alienation and uselessness. Yet this is what our schools of architecture are doing at this day. They are inculcating the meretricious in their pseudo-explanations of the architectural art, and with pedantic persistency, they ignore the natural, the obvious. To be sure, you may say they teach as they have been taught. In a limited measure, that is true. Yet evasion cannot absolve them from performance; and plain performance means to teach in a thoroughgoing way. If they persist in teaching what is unintelligent, they cannot hope to escape an eventual accounting. The statements set forth in their school prospectuses are, many of them, sophistical. If these sophistries are due to mental laziness, because these schools *will not* seek the truth, do not want to know the truth, do not wish to have the truth pointed out to them, then are they doubly reprehensible. Now, these documents are crafty in the use of phrases, specious in argument, plausible in explanation. But all the plausibilities combined cannot explain away the ineptitude. We need brains in our architectural schools! We need men of large hearts, luminous minds, rich sympathies; men who can grasp the significance of youth, the social value of democracy and of creative art.

Yet there is a larger test by which these schools may be tested: it is a broad fact, as broad and plain as the land, that in many other departments of education, teachers have made positive strides in advance. They have been animated in their work by enthusiasm, by devotion, by love; and their noble and earnest effort is bearing daily fruit. These teachers look upon teaching as an art to which they willingly devote their lives. The study of the child, the study of the young has been pursued by them with intelligence and devotion; and the *kindergarten* has brought bloom to the mind of many a child: and all this is the result of a growing philosophy of education. But there is, alas, no *architectural kindergarten*—a garden of the heart wherein the simple, obvious truths, the truths that any child might consent to, are brought fresh to the faculties and are held to be good because they are true and real.

> *Tell yourself that education will commence the day when the atmosphere will be completely rid of the least miasma of "sanction." And the most difficult to disinfect will maybe be children.*
>
> —*Fernand Deligny, 1945*

Louis Sullivan, *from* Kindergarten Chats. *In 1872, at age sixteen, Sullivan matriculated at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He left after his first year to work in a Philadelphia architectural firm, and in 1874 he sailed to Paris to study at the École des Beaux-Arts, again leaving after a year. The essays published in* Kindergarten Chats*—so named for their elementary subjects—were first serialized in* Interstate Architect and Builder *magazine in 1901. Their purpose, Sullivan later wrote, was to foster in the reader "natural, spontaneous powers which had been submerged and ignored during his academic training."*

c. 600 BC: Greece

MNEMONIC DEVICE

Hermes took the lyre upon his left arm and tried each string in turn with the key, so that it sounded awesomely at his touch. And Phoebus Apollo laughed for joy; for the sweet throb of the marvelous music went to his heart, and a soft longing took hold of his soul as he listened.

Apollo opened his mouth and spoke winged words to Hermes: "Come now, tell me this, resourceful son of Maia: Has this marvelous thing been with you from your birth, or did some god or mortal man give it to you—a noble gift—and teach you heavenly song? For wonderful is this new-uttered sound I hear, the like of which I vow that no man nor god dwelling on Olympus ever yet has known but you, O thievish son of Maia. What skill is this? What song for desperate cares? What way of song? For verily here are three things to hand all at once from which to choose—mirth and love and sweet sleep. And though I am a follower of the Olympian Muses, who love dances and the bright path of song—the full-toned chant and ravishing thrill of flutes—yet I never cared for any of those feats of skill at young men's revels as I do now for this. I am filled with wonder, O son of Zeus, at your sweet playing. But now since you, though little, have such glorious skill, sit down, dear boy, and respect the words of your elders. For now you shall have renown among the deathless gods, you and your mother also. This I will declare to you exactly: by this shaft of cornel wood, I will surely make you a leader renowned among the deathless gods, and fortunate, and will give you glorious gifts and will not deceive you from first to last."

Then Hermes answered him with artful words: "You question me carefully, O Far-Worker; yet I am not jealous that you should enter upon my art; this day you shall know it. For I seek to be friendly with you both in thought and word. Now, you well know all things in your heart, since you sit foremost among the deathless gods, O son of Zeus, and are goodly and strong. And wise Zeus loves you and has given you splendid gifts. And they say that from the utterance of Zeus, you have learned both the honors due to the gods, O Far-Worker, and oracles from Zeus, even all his ordinances. Of all these I myself have already learned that you have great wealth. Now, you are free to learn whatever you please; but since, as it seems, your heart is so strongly set on playing the lyre, chant, and play upon it, and give yourself to merriment, taking this as a gift from me, and do you, my friend, bestow glory on me. Sing well with this clear-voiced companion in your hands; for you are skilled in good, well-ordered utterance. From now on bring it confidently to the rich feast and lovely dance and glorious revel, a joy by night and by day. Whoso with wit and wisdom inquires of it cunningly, him it teaches through its sound all manner of things that delight the mind, being easily played with gentle familiarities, for it abhors toilsome drudgery; but whoso in ignorance inquires of it violently, to him it chatters mere vanity and foolishness. But you are able to learn whatever you please. So then, I will give you this lyre, glorious son of Zeus."

When Hermes had said this, he held out the lyre, and Phoebus Apollo took it and readily put his shining whip in Hermes' hand and ordained him keeper of herds.

Education—a debt due from present to future generations.

—George Peabody, 1852

From the Homeric Hymns. Composed in hexameter, the same meter as the Homeric epics, these thirty-three songs honoring the Greek pantheon were declared by Thucydides to be the work of Homer, although modern scholars argue that they were more likely composed by several different poets between 700 and 500 BC and were originally intended for performance at festivals, many of which included singing competitions. This hymn, the fourth, is the longest. In it, the infant god Hermes steals Apollo's cattle, vowing to become "a prince of robbers."



Demonstrators protesting the desegregation of Central High School, Little Rock, Arkansas, 1959.

c. 1950: Appenzell

BOARD GAME

It was clear I would have to spend the best years of my life in boarding school. From eight to seventeen. Previously they'd left me with an elderly lady, a grandmother. One day she decided she couldn't put up with me anymore, she said I was a savage. And yet I resembled nothing so much as her portrait hanging in the dining room. That's why she wanted me out of her sight. Now I look more and more like her. She, too, is in one of the graves. With her indigo eyes. Thanks to her I went to a lot of boarding schools, got to know headmistresses, reverend mothers, mother superiors, and *Mères préfètes*, but none of them had the authority my grandmother had. I always felt I could fool them, that their power was temporary, even if I did kiss their hands.

That happened in Italy, in a school run by French nuns, where, as usual, I was a boarder. Every evening, before going to bed, in dormitories as always, I would climb a narrow staircase with my companions. At the top, *Mère préfète* was waiting. Every evening she held out her hand under the dimmest possible light bulb in the glimmer of the narrow stairs, before you went through into the nighttime glow of the dormitories. Queuing up, we kissed her hand one by one. Then to the washbasins, then to bed, in the becalmed dormitories. The sheets felt stiff. Outside, if the moon and stars were up, lay a visionary desert.

They had taught us to curtsy, if I'm not mistaken, in four stages when in the presence of the reverend mother superior. I don't remember how the reverend *Mère préfète*'s skin tasted, but I made that gesture of submission in exemplarily automatic fashion; I found it natural, and I liked to stop and take in the whole scene with my companions queuing behind. Though I held her hand between thumb and index finger, my lips did not touch the skin; a sort of repugnance at our shared carnality crept over me.

The *Mère préfète*'s eyes were blue as alpine lakes at dawn, childish and venomous. She was so much a *fin de race* that her eyelids had turned to white lead; generations of supplicants must have kissed the hands of her forebears, before the guillotine. She had an oriental look to her, her forehead was covered with a veil, and veils are becoming on women, even old women. They confer majesty and mystery. And treachery. There was something soft about her body, something *faisandé*. The imminence of her return to dust, to ashes, and her imperious cream-colored robes, conspired with the stiffness natural to her status to make her look like some great dame of sepulchres. Her voice was

querulous sometimes, and extremely young, the way you might imagine the voices of eunuchs.

There, with the French nuns, I beheld class distinctions in all their sharpness. There were the dark-robed nuns, they were the humblest, the ones with no dowry, the poor who had to do the heavy jobs for the others. We addressed them as "Sister," and we could show disdain if we so desired. The reverend mothers treated them with condescension and bright, buttery smiles. And in that school we all knew which of us were poor or orphans. There was one girl who didn't pay the fees, and she did favors and little kindnesses for the *Mère préfète*. And maybe she spied. We were kind to her, she came from a family that had come down in the world, her eyes were silky blue and yellow. She was blond and she came from the South; but a bothersome flibbertigibbet, because she was a spy. A spy, we supposed, out of necessity. We could have given her much more than the very reverend mothers did, but she was naturally inclined to be submissive to authority. Some people are born like that. We tried to win her over, but she wasn't interested. She should have been taller, her calves were close to her ankles, there was no lift to her figure. Seated, she was very pretty, her complexion and the color of her hair suited her small, slightly rough pottery face. She was an older pupil, kept out of charity. She was over eighteen, and that was sad. She practiced her vocation—to us it seemed a profession—of being poor very well.

Some men never recover from education.
—Oliver St. John Gogarty, 1954

She attached a value to her poverty, the way others might to their extravagance. She was truly possessed by her indigent state, all she had was herself, but it was more than enough, since the aromas of servitude bubbled up from her constantly, a natural predisposition. How small and slippery her feet were when she went quick as quick up and down the corridor, and how well she knew how to disappear when the Reverend Mother called her, barely whispering her name. Reverend mothers always speak very softly. And how she would genuflect sideways in the chapel! Her big eyes were well suited to contemplating the crucifix. If she hadn't been an informer, we would have believed, generously, in her magnanimous devotion and obedience.

At the Bausler Institut, you don't kiss the headmistress' hand. It's Frau Hofstetter who sometimes pretends to kiss your cheeks. She touches your cheek with her own, and even though this gesture has nothing to do with kissing, it is monstrous all the same. I don't know how the little black girl can put up with it. She gets real kisses, we've seen. And she doesn't give the slightest impression of being in need of affection, the black girl. Her expression is changing. It no longer looks like a doll's, it is losing that depth toys have, that impassive, fatuous rigidity, that stupor of good little children.

Almost all of us have been lured into a state of stupor. Especially one small group of older girls. In the first term they were lazy, slothful, and could barely speak in German, they had already been together in Kiruna or somewhere, they were almost married already, too adult for the Bausler. In boarding schools, or at least the ones where I went, a sort of senile childhood was protracted almost to insanity. We knew why those big girls with their exhausted vivacity sat down throughout recreation periods, as though waiting, whispering to each other and looking after their complexions. They were the clique of the experienced; they had already given themselves to the world, or at least so they would have had us believe. The first round was over, and the next rounds buzzed like halos around their golden heads. They were the old ones.

Fleur Jaeggy, *from* Sweet Days of Discipline. *Born in Zurich in 1940, Jaeggy, a novelist and translator, drew on her own experience as an adolescent in Swiss boarding schools when writing this novel, her fourth and the first to be translated from Italian into English. "We are experts when it comes to women, we who have spent our best years in boarding schools," says the narrator. "When you're in boarding school, you imagine how grand and fine the world is, and when you leave you'd sometimes like to hear the sound of the school bell again."*



The Education of Achilles, by Eugène Delacroix, 1862.

1798: Stans

STUDY HALL

I was on the point of bringing out an extensive plan of education in Aargau when the orphan home at Stans was burned down, and I was at once offered that unfortunate place for my residence. The number of children increased gradually to eighty, all of different ages; some full of pretensions, others wayside beggars; all, except a few, wholly ignorant. What a task! To form and develop these children!

As I was obliged to give the children instruction, alone and without help, I learned the art of teaching many together; and since I had no other means but loud speaking, the idea of making the learners draw, write, and work at the same time was naturally developed. The utter ignorance of all made me stay long over the beginnings; and this led me to realize the high degree of inner power to be obtained by perfecting the first beginnings, and the result of a feeling of completeness and perfection in the lowest stage. The result of attending to this perfecting of the early stages far outran my expectations. It quickly developed in the children a consciousness of hitherto-unknown power, and particularly a general sense of beauty and order. They felt their own power, and the tediousness of the

1859: Springfield, IL

AUTODIDACT

My father, at the death of his father, was but six years of age, and he grew up literally without education. He removed from Kentucky to what is now Spencer County, Indiana, in my eighth year. We reached our new home about the time the state came into the union. It was a wild region, with many bears and other wild animals still in the woods. There I grew up. There were some schools, so called, but no qualification was ever required of a teacher beyond "readin', writin', and cipherin'" to the "rule of three." If a straggler supposed to understand Latin happened to sojourn in the neighborhood, he was looked upon as a wizard. There was absolutely nothing to excite ambition for education. Of course, when I came of age, I did not know much. Still, somehow I could read, write, and cipher to the rule of three, but that was all. I have not been to school since. The little advance I now have upon this store of education I have picked up from time to time under the pressure of necessity.

Abraham Lincoln, *from a letter to Jesse W. Fell. Lincoln met Fell, who was at the time working as a lobbyist, during a session of the Illinois state legislature around 1834. In 1858 Fell pointed out that Lincoln's popularity was rising on the East Coast and requested an extended interview that would present Lincoln to the larger American populace as a potential candidate for president. After resisting Fell's request for about a year, Lincoln sent this autobiographical sketch, insisting that "if anything be made out of it, I wish it to be modest."*

ordinary school tone vanished like a ghost from my rooms. They wished—tried—persevered—succeeded, and they laughed. Their tone was not that of learners; it was the tone of unknown powers awakened from sleep, of a heart and mind exalted with the feeling of what these powers could and would lead them to do.

Children taught children. They tried to put into practice what I told them to do and often came themselves on the track of the means of its execution, from many sides. This self-activity, which had developed itself in many ways in the beginning of learning, worked with great force on the birth and growth of the conviction in me that all true, all educative instruction must be drawn out of the children themselves, and be born within them. To this I was led chiefly by necessity. Since I had no fellow helpers, I put a capable child between two less capable ones; he embraced them with both arms, he told them what he knew, and they learned to repeat after him what they knew not.

I am now thoroughly convinced; it was a long time before I was; but I had children in Stans whose powers, not deadened by the weariness of unpsychological home and school discipline, developed more quickly. It was another race. Even the paupers were different from the town paupers and the weaklings of our corn and vine lands. I saw the capacity of human nature and its peculiarities in many ways, and in most open play. Its defects were the defects of healthy nature, immeasurably different from the defects caused by bad and artificial teaching—hopeless flagging and complete crippling of the mind. I saw in this combination of unschooled ignorance a power of seeing and a firm conception of the known and the seen of which our ABC puppets have no notion.

I felt my Stans experiment had decided that it was possible to found popular instruction on psychological grounds, to lay true knowledge, gained by sense impression at its foundation, and to tear away the mask of its superficial bombast. I felt I could solve the problem to men of penetration and unprejudiced mind; but the prejudiced crowd, like geese that, ever since they cracked the shell, have been shut up in the coop and shed, and so have lost all power of flying and swimming, I could never make wise, as I well knew.

Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, *from* How Gertrude Teaches Her Children. *In 1774 Pestalozzi established his first school, where he trained impoverished students in reading, writing, and arithmetic as well as in spinning and weaving. In 1799 he began teaching in Burgdorf, where a year later he opened a boarding school and teacher-training institute in a castle provided by the Helvetian government. "Seeing popular education lying before me like an immeasurable swamp, I plunged into its slime," he wrote afterward, "till I at last discovered the sources of its waters, the reason of their stagnation."*

1872: Basel

DEAD LETTERS

An important philosopher's younger companion had just explained to his teacher, in an honest and forthright fashion, why he had become demoralized, left his teaching post, and was spending his days in inconsolable, self-imposed solitude. Arrogance had played no part in his decision.

"I have heard too much from you, teacher, and spent too much time in your presence," the worthy young man said, "to have faith in our current pedagogical and cultural regime. I feel all too clearly its hopeless errors and defects, which you have so often pointed out, and yet I see in myself all too little of the strength I would need to prevail in a valiant struggle to shatter the bulwarks of this supposed education. My flight into solitude was not arrogance or presumption; I felt totally discouraged." He then explained his actions by giving his view of the educational system in such a way that the philosopher could not help but respond in a sympathetic, reassuring tone. "You have said enough, my poor friend," he said. "I understand you better now, and I should not have spoken such hard words to you before. You are right about everything—except your discouragement. Let me now tell you something that will give you solace.

"How long do you think today's schools will persist in the educational practices that weigh so heavily upon you? I make no secret of what I think: their time is past, their days are numbered. The first man who dares to be completely honest about them will hear his honesty echoing back from a thousand other brave souls. For buried in the men of the present age, beneath all their noble gifts and warm sentiments, is an unspoken common cause: every one of them remembers what he had to suffer in school; every one of them wants, if nothing

It's Good to Start Learning, by Totoya Hokkei, c. 1822.



else, to save his descendants from such a system, even at some risk to himself. But due to the sad poverty of spirit in pedagogy today, this longing is never voiced openly. There is no true creative talent here, which is to say truly practical men with good new ideas, who know that real genius and correct practice necessarily go together; our plodding practitioners have no good ideas, and thus no correct practice, either. Just read around in today's pedagogical literature—anyone not utterly horrified to see it clumsily chase its own tail with an incalculable poverty of spirit is beyond help. Here our philosophy must begin not with wonder but with horror, and no one incapable of such a feeling should touch pedagogical matters. The reverse has been the rule up until now, of course. Those who were horrified, like you, my poor friend, ran skittishly away, while the reasonable types, not susceptible to horror, laid their coarse hands coarsely upon the most delicate process in any art: the process of education. But soon this state of affairs will no longer be possible. Let just one honest man turn up with good new ideas and the courage to bring them to fruition, even at the cost of breaking with everyone and everything around him; let him present just one glorious example, which coarse hands, the only ones hitherto at work, could never imitate; then people will begin to see and feel the difference, at least, and have a chance to reflect on the reason for it. They will no longer believe, as so many in all good conscience still do, that the craft of pedagogy can be the labor of coarse hands."

His companion replied, "Honored teacher, you give voice so courageously to your hopes. Give me an example, just one, if you can, to help me to share them. The gymnasium, for instance, which we both know well: Do you actually think that honesty and good new ideas can eradicate the stubborn old habits there? It seems to me that the gymnasium defends itself not with a hard wall, strong enough to withstand the battering ram, as it were, but with the deadly, slippery tenacity of all its principles. There is no tangible, visible opponent to crush, only a masked enemy able to take on a hundred shapes and slip free, giving way like a coward and then suddenly bouncing back to confound his attackers again and again. It was the state of the gymnasium, in particular, that made me flee into demoralized solitude, because I felt that if you could win that battle, all the other educational institutions would have to follow suit, but if you lost, there would be no choice but to give up on all the most serious pedagogical questions. So, master, instruct me: What hope can we cherish for the gymnasium's destruction and its rebirth?"

"I, too, feel the gymnasium is as important as you say," the philosopher replied. "Every other institution is measured against its educational goals; any wrong turn the gymnasium takes will affect all the others. Renewing and purifying *it* will renew and purify the rest. Let me begin concretely with something we have all experienced in the gymnasium and all still suffer from. Scrutinized with a rigorous eye, what is *German class* at the gymnasium today?

Roman funerary relief with a school scene, Germany, c. 185.



"First, let me say what it should be. Everyone nowadays automatically speaks and writes in a German so vulgar and bad that it could exist only in an age of Newspaper German. That is why any nobly endowed young man should be forcibly placed under a bell jar of good taste and strict linguistic discipline. If that is not possible, then better to return to speaking only Latin, out of shame at a language as ruined and debased as ours.

"What should the task of an institution of higher learning be, when it comes to language, if not to lead linguistically wild and unkempt youths to the right path, with dignified rigor and this authoritative command: 'Take your language seriously! If you cannot feel a sacred duty here, then you have not even the seed of higher culture within you. How you handle your mother tongue reveals how much you respect art, or how little; how close an affinity you have for it. If certain words and turns of phrase habitual in today's journalism do not inspire physical disgust, then abandon your pursuit of culture. Here, right before you, every time you speak and write, you have a touchstone for how difficult and enormous a task the cultured person faces today, and how unlikely it is that many of you will become truly educated.'

"Were this the gymnasium's command, the German teacher's duty would be to point out, with the complete assurance of a good ear, a thousand little details to his students and to categorically forbid them from using phrases such as *to call for*, *to pocket*, *take into account*, *seize the initiative*, *it goes without saying*, and so on and so forth *cum taedio in infinitum*. This teacher would also have to show, line by line, how carefully and rigorously we would have to take every turn of phrase in our classic writers if we kept a true feeling for art in our hearts and the goal of complete intelligibility in our sights. He will force his students to express the same thought over and over again, a little better each time, and will stop at nothing until he has inspired in the less gifted students a pious awe for the language and in the more gifted a noble enthusiasm.

"Instead of providing purely practical instruction and accustoming the student to rigorous self-improvement through a strict cultivation of language, teachers everywhere take a scholarly historical approach to the mother tongue. They teach German like a dead language, with no sense of obligation toward its present and its future. This historicism has become so prevalent in our time that even the living body of our language is handed over for anatomical dissection. But education begins precisely when we understand that a living thing is *alive*; the task of the educator is precisely to *suppress* the 'historical interest' that presses in on all sides, especially where it is a question of *proper action*, not merely *understanding* something. Students need to learn how to use the mother tongue properly—and this practical perspective is the only justification for teaching German in our educational institutions. The historical approach seems much easier and more comfortable to the teacher, of course; it is appropriate even for the less talented and demands much less effort and will. But what is easy and comfortable always cloaks itself in proud terminology and ostentatious pretensions—we see this in every pedagogical field. The practical approach appropriate to true education—the approach that actually works—is always fundamentally more difficult, and thus earns only looks of resentment and disdain. That is why the honest man has to make this quid pro quo clear, both to himself and to others."

> *To teach is to learn twice over.*
>
> *—Joseph Joubert, c. 1805*

Friedrich Nietzsche, *from* Anti-Education. *In 1869, at the age of twenty-four, Nietzsche was offered a professorship in the classical philology department at the University of Basel, despite not yet having completed his doctoral studies. The professor who recommended him wrote that he was "the first from whom I have accepted any contribution at all while he was still a student" and insisted that the young Nietzsche "will simply be able to do anything he wants to do." The following year Nietzsche was promoted to full professor and became a Swiss citizen.*

c. 800: Mount Jishi

GRADUATION CEREMONY

Shaoyou was sitting in his tent reading dispatches by candlelight. Suddenly, a cold gust of air blew out the candle and a young woman materialized in the middle of the tent as if she had come out of the very air. In her hand she wielded a double-edged sword that gleamed like frost.

Shaoyou realized she was an assassin, but his voice did not waver, and he said to her calmly and sternly, "What manner of woman are you that you come in the night air to the middle of my camp? What is your purpose?"

The learn'd are happy, nature to explore;
The fool is happy, that he knows no more.
—Alexander Pope, c. 1732

"I have been sent by Zenbo, king of Tibet," she said. "I am to return with your head."

Shaoyou laughed. "The superior man never fears death. Take it—quickly—and go."

But the girl threw down her sword and bowed her head, saying, "Do not worry. I could not do such a thing."

"You come bearing a sword and infiltrated my camp, and yet you will not harm me? So what is your purpose, then?"

"I want to tell you my story, but I cannot give you all the details now," she said.

Shaoyou asked her to sit down. "You faced great danger to find me. Now tell me why you came."

"I have been trained as an assassin, but I do not have the heart of one. I will tell you what is in my heart." She rose, relit the candle, and sat down in front of him.

Looking at her again in the light, Shaoyou saw that her hair, fastened high with a golden hairpin, was like a dark cloud. She wore a military jacket with narrow sleeves embroidered with small pink flowers. Her boots were high-backed, shaped like a phoenix tail, and she wore a dragon scabbard for her sword. Her face was like a wild rose covered in morning dew, and when she spoke, with cherry-red lips, her voice was like an oriole's.

"I am originally from Yangzhou, from a family that has been Tang subjects for generations. I lost my parents when I was a child, but I was found by a woman who became my teacher and I her disciple. She was a master of the sword, and of her disciples, three were the best: Zhen Haiyue, Jin Caihong, and me—Shen Niaoyan.

"After devoting myself for three years to the art of the sword, I also learned the art of transformation. I can ride the wind, follow the lightning, and traverse a thousand *li* in an instant. The three of us were equally matched in our swordsmanship, but whenever our teacher wanted to destroy an enemy or kill some evil person, she would always send Haiyue or Caihong. She never once sent me.

"I could not get over my anger at this, and I asked my teacher, 'The three of us have studied under you together, but I am the only one who never gets to repay your kindness. I do not understand. Is it that my skill is inferior, or do you not trust me?'

"My teacher answered, 'You are not really one of us. In time you will learn your proper path and achieve perfection. It would mar your virtue if I sent you to kill men like the others, and that is why I have never sent you.'

" 'Then what is the use of teaching me how to use the sword?' I asked.

" 'Your destiny lies in the empire of Tang, where you will meet your master,' she said. 'He is a superior man. I have taught you that humble skill so that you will be able to meet him. You will have to enter a camp of thousands of men, where you will find him among the swords and spears. The Tang emperor will send a great general against the Tibetan army, and the king, Zenbo, has advertised for an assassin to kill that general. Take this opportunity. Go down from this mountain and go to Tibet and show off your skill as an assassin. With one edge you apply your training, with the other you meet the man for whom you are destined.'



Rice Cultivation Through the Four Seasons, Japan, c. 1700.

"I did as my teacher said and went immediately to Tibet, where I tore down the notice on the city gate and took it to the king. He summoned me and tested my skill against the other assassins. After I cut off the topknots of a dozen men, he decided I was the best, and he chose me, saying, 'Bring me the head of the Tang general, and I will make you my first consort.'

"But now I have met you, and it is as my teacher said. Please, my only wish is to be with you, even if I must serve as a companion to your ladies-in-waiting. Will you take me?"

Shaoyou was very pleased. "I was condemned to die, but you have saved my life, and now you wish to belong to me? How can I ever repay you? I wish we could marry and be together for a hundred years."

And so they consummated their meeting. The gleam of the sword served as nuptial candles, and the boom of battle gongs replaced the sound of lutes. Bathed in soft moonlight, that distant tent was more joyful than a silk-curtained bridal chamber. Their ecstasy soared like the mountains and thundered like the ocean surf.

Kim Man-jung, *from* The Nine Cloud Dream. *Kim was born in 1637 to an elite but impoverished recent widow. He received top scores in his civil-service examinations and joined the Joseon court, but less than a decade later he was exiled for the first of several times, following a controversy over funeral etiquette. According to one account, Kim composed this novel about a young monk's spiritual development at the request of his mother, who had secured educational books for her sons by copying out borrowed copies of the Chinese classics by hand.*



Speech lessons at Clarke School for the Deaf, Northampton, Massachusetts, c. 1980. Photograph by Nathan Benn.

c. 1900: New Haven, CT

SOCIAL CLEARINGHOUSE

By the opening of the winter term, Stover, the enthusiast, had begun to see the weakness of movements that must depend on organization. The debating club, which had started with a zest, soon showed its limitations. Once the edge of novelty had worn off, there were too many diverting interests to throng in and deplete the ranks.

When, following Regan's suggestion, they had attempted a new division on the lines of the political parties, the result was decidedly disappointing. There was no natural interest to draw upon, and the political discussions, instead of fanning the club into a storm of partisanship, lapsed into the hands of perfunctory debaters.

Regan himself took his disillusionment much to heart. They discussed the reasons for the failure one stormy afternoon at one of their informal discussions, to which they had returned with longing.

"What the devil is the matter?" said the big fellow savagely. "Why, where I come from, the people I see, every mother's son of them, feed on politics, talk nothing else—they love it! And here if you ask a man if he's a Republican or a Democrat, he writes home and asks his father. A condition like this doesn't exist anywhere else on the face of the globe. And this is America. Why?"

When he had propounded the question, there was a busy, unresponsive puffing of pipes, and then Pike added, "That's what hits me, too. Just look at the questions that are coming up; popular election of senators, income tax, direct primaries; it's like building over the government again, and no one here cares or knows what's doing. I say, why?"

"There may be fifty-two reasons for it," said Brockhurst, in his staccato, biting way. "One is, our colleges are all turning into social clearinghouses, and everyone is too absorbed in that engrossing process to know what happens outside; second is the fact that our universities are admirably organized instruments for the prevention of learning!"

"Good old Brocky," said Swazey with a chuckle. "Just what I like: stormy outside, warm inside, and Brocky at the bat. Serve 'em up."

Brockhurst, who was used to this reception of his pointed generalizations, paid no heed. He, too, had grown in mental stature and in control. A certain diffidence was over him, and always would be; but when a subject came up that interested him, he forgot himself and rushed into the argument with a zeal that never failed to arouse his listeners.

Brockhurst turned on Swazey with the license that was always permissible.

"Well, what do you know? Now let me try you. Please raise hands, little boys, when you

know the answer to these questions, but don't bluff teacher. I'm not contending you should have a detailed knowledge of the world in your eager, studious minds. I am saying that you haven't the slightest general information. I'll make my questions fair.

"First, music: I won't ask you the tendencies and theories of the modern schools—you won't know that such a thing as a theory in music exists. You know the opera of *Carmen*—good old 'Toreador Song.' Do you know the name of the composer? One hand—Bob Story. Do you know the history of its reception? Do you know the sources of it? Do you know what Bach's influence was in the development of music? Did you ever hear of Leoncavallo, Verdi, or that there is such a thing as a Russian composer? Absolute silence. You have a hazy knowledge of Wagner, and you know that Chopin wrote a funeral march. That is your foothold in music; there you balance, surrounded by howling waters of ignorance.

"Take up religion. Do you know anything about Confucius, Shintoism, or Swedenborg, beyond the names? Of course you would not know that under Louis XVI a determined movement was made to reunite the Catholic and Protestant branches, which almost succeeded. That's unfair, because of course it is the forerunner of the great religious movement today. Do you know the history of the external symbols of the Christian religion, and what is historically new? Darkness denser and denser.

"Take literature. You have excavated a certain amount of Shakespeare and grubbed among Elizabethans and cursed Spenser. Who has read Taine's *History of English Literature*, or known in fact who Taine is? Only Bob Story. And yet there is the greatest book on the whole subject; you could abolish the English department and substitute it. Beside Story, who else has had even a fair reading knowledge of any other literature—Russian, Norwegian, German, French, Italian? Who knows enough about any one of these writers to look wise and nod; Renan, Turgenev, Daudet, Bjørnson, Hauptmann, Sudermann, Strindberg? Do you know anything about Goethe as a critic, or the influence of Poe upon French literature? What do you know? I'll tell you. You know *Les Misérables* and *The Three Musketeers* in French literature. You know

c. 1495: Ingolstadt

RATE MY PROFESSOR

By your long and incessant scoldings, with which you frequently consume half the hour, you force us to make some reply in the name of truth. You accuse us of madness and charge that we are stupid barbarians, and you call wild beasts those whose fees support you. This we might have borne with better grace, but for the fact that you yourself abound in the faults of which you accuse us. For what of the fact that while you carp about us, you yourself are so torpid from dissipation that in private conversation your drowsy head droops to your elbow like a figure eight? You touch on many points in questions, but you speak neither plain argument nor cultured speech nor elegant Latin expositions; nor do you observe true coherence and order of speaking. Yet you have at hand the motto "He teaches clearly who understands clearly." Either you lack understanding—a shameful thing in a doctor—or you think us unworthy of your learning, which is incredible. For you certainly experience daily studious auditors, sometimes learned men, calculated to adorn you with great praise. Or you dislike the labor of lecturing, as we clearly comprehend, understand, and see. In this one point, you both derogate from your own reputation and seem to us all deficient. But now we have clearly expressed ourselves on that point. Wherefore, if you are ready and willing to vindicate the name and dignity of a preceptor and doctor, to fulfill your professorial duties, we will be more attentive. If first, as befits you, you clear yourself of the fault you impute to us, you will make us more diligent by your diligence, which has now long been lacking, if you can conquer and overcome your dislike of study and tardiness in work. If you do less, we shall have to take more stringent measures.

From a complaint by the students of Conrad Celtes at the University of Ingolstadt. Celtes, a humanist poet, completed his studies at the University of Heidelberg two years before he was named the poet laureate of Nuremberg and awarded a doctorate of philosophy. In 1492 he began teaching at Ingolstadt, where he often missed lectures, once canceling class to attend a wine tasting. In 1496 he arrived for the new semester an entire month late. "Celtes has no fault," one of his colleagues commented, "other than he does not like to lecture."

Goethe wrote *Faust*. You're beginning to know Ibsen as a name, and one may have read Tolstoy, and all know that he's a very old man with a long white beard who lives among his peasants, has some queer ideas, and has started to die three or four times. The papers have told you that.

"Take another field, of simple curiosity on what is doing in a world in which by opportunity you are supposed to be of the leading class. What do you know about the strength and spread of socialism in Germany, France, and England? In the first place, no one of you here probably has any idea of what socialism is; you've been told it's anarchy, and as that only means dynamite to you, you are against socialism and will never take the trouble to investigate it. What do you know about the new political experiments in New Zealand? Nothing. What do you know about the labor pension system in Germany, or the separation of the church and state in France? All subjects dealing with the vital development of the race of bipeds on this earth of which you happen to be members."

> *The highest result of education is tolerance.*
> *—Helen Keller, 1903*

"Help!" cried Hungerford, as Brockhurst went rushing on. "Great Scott, what *do* we know?"

"You know absolutely nothing," said Brockhurst savagely. "Here you are; look at yourselves—four years when you ought to learn something, some informing knowledge of all that has developed during the four thousand years the human race has fought its way toward the light, four years to be filled with the marvel and splendor of it all, and you don't know a thing.

"You have no general knowledge, no intellectual interests, you haven't even opinions, and at the end of four years of *education*, you will march up and be handed a degree—bachelor of arts! Magnificent! And we Americans have a sense of humor! Do you wonder why I repeat that our colleges are splendidly organized institutions for the prevention of learning? No, sir, we are business colleges, and the business of our machines is to stamp out so many businessmen a year, running at full speed and in competition with the latest devices in Cambridge and Princeton! The whole theory is wrong, archaic, and ridiculous—the theory of education by schedule. All education can do is to instill the love of knowledge. You get that, you catch the fire of it—you educate yourself. All education does today is to develop the memory at the expense of the imagination. It says: 'Here are so many pounds of Greek, Latin, mathematics, history, literature. In four years our problem is to pass them through the heads of these hundreds of young barbarians so that they will come out with a lip knowledge.'"

"But come, we do learn something," said Hungerford.

"No, you don't, Joe," said Brockhurst. "The main trouble here is, and there is no blinking the fact, that the colleges have surrendered unconsciously a great deal of their power to the growing influence of the social organization. In a period when we have no society in America, families are sending their sons to colleges to place themselves socially. Some of them carry it to an extreme, even directly avow their hope that they will make certain clubs at Princeton or Harvard, or a senior society here. It probably is very hard to control, but it's going to turn our colleges more and more, as I say, into social clearinghouses. At present here at Yale, we keep down the question of wealth pretty well; fellows like Joe Hungerford here come in and live on our basis. That's the best feature about Yale today—how it will be in the future I don't know, for it depends on the wisdom of the parents."

"Social clearinghouse is well coined," said Hungerford. "I think it's truer, though, of Harvard."

Owen Johnson, *from* Stover at Yale. *After graduating in 1901 from Yale, where he chaired the college literary magazine, Johnson moved to Paris and published his first novel. "It seemed to me that the four years of college was the time when the soul goes through the crucible," Johnson told an interviewer in 1912. When the interviewer told Johnson that, according to a poll, 86 percent of Yale's senior class believed* Stover at Yale *an exaggeration of the college experience, Johnson criticized "this uneducated and unreasoning college loyalty."*

1882: Pune

PERNICIOUS SYSTEM

It is an admitted fact that the greater portion of the revenues of the Indian Empire are derived from the *ryot*'s [tenant farmer's] labor—from the sweat of his brow. The higher and richer classes contribute little or nothing to the state's exchequer. A well-informed English writer states that "our income is derived not from surplus profits but from capital; not from luxuries but from the poorest necessaries. It is the product of sin and tears."

That government should expend profusely a large portion of revenue thus raised on the education of the higher classes, for it is these only who take advantage of it, is anything but just or equitable.

Their object in patronizing this virtual high-class education appears to be to prepare scholars. "Who, it is thought, would in time vend learning without money and without price," states the writer above alluded to.

We ask the friends of Indian universities to favor us with a single example of the truth of their theory from the instances which have already fallen within the scope of their experience. They have educated many children of wealthy men, and have been the means of advancing very materially the worldly prospects of some of their pupils; but what contribution have these made to the great work of regenerating their fellow men? How have they begun to act upon the masses? Have any of them formed classes at their own homes or elsewhere for the instruction of their less fortunate or less wise countrymen? Or have they kept their knowledge to themselves, as a personal gift, not to be soiled by contact with the ignorant vulgar? Have they in any way shown themselves anxious to advance the general interests and repay the philanthropy with patriotism?

Perhaps the most glaring tendency of the government system of high-class education has been the virtual monopoly of all the

The Skiing Lesson, by Joan Miró, 1966.





Feng Shui Practitioner, by Zhou Peichun, 1885.

higher offices under them by the Brahmans. If the welfare of the *ryot* is at heart, if it is the duty of government to check a host of abuses, it behooves them to narrow this monopoly day by day, so as to allow a sprinkling of the other castes to get into the public service. Perhaps some might be inclined to say that it is not feasible in the present state of education. Our only reply is that if government would look a little less after higher education and more toward the education of the masses, the former being able to take care of itself, there would be no difficulty in training up a body of men in every way qualified and perhaps far better in morals and manners.

My object in writing the present volume is not only to tell my Sudra brethren how they have been duped by the Brahmans but also to open the eyes of government to that pernicious system of high-class education. I sincerely hope that government will ere long see the error of their ways, trust less to writers or men who look through high-class spectacles, and take the glory into their own hands of emancipating my Sudra brethren from the trammels of bondage which the Brahmans have woven around them like the coils of a serpent. It is no less the duty of such of my Sudra brethren as have received any education to place before government the true state of their fellow men and endeavor to the best of their power to emancipate themselves from Brahman thralldom. Let there be schools for the Sudras in every village; but away with all Brahman schoolmasters! The Sudras are the life and sinews of the country, and it is to them alone and not to the Brahmans that the government must ever look to tide them over in their difficulties, financial as well as political. If the hearts and minds of the Sudras are made happy and contented, the British government need have no fear for their loyalty in the future.

Jotirao Phule, *from a deposition before the Indian Education Commission. When Phule was around eleven years old, according to some accounts, his father was convinced to withdraw him from the local school by a Brahman clerk who felt threatened by the boy's literacy. Three years later Phule resumed his studies in English, and after graduating in 1847 he opened a school for lower-caste girls. "Female schools," he declared, are "even more necessary than male ones, the root of education lying in the proper turn mothers give to the disposition of children between their second and third years."*

c. 985: Baghdad

GROUP PROJECT

One spring day in Baghdad, Abu Sulayman went out to the steppe, seeking amusement and conviviality with a number of his companions. Among them there was a young lad—sullen, repulsive, and abusive. Despite these defects, he would chant melodiously, with a delicate body, plaintive voice, mellow intonation, and charming rendition.

A group accompanied him of the elegant people of the quarter and young men of the neighborhood, each one suitably and thoroughly educated. When they paused for a breather, the lad launched into his specialty, reaching his peak. His companions were carried into ecstasy and swung rhythmically, enraptured.

Abu Zakariyya al-Saymari said, "I commented to a bright companion of mine, 'Do you see what is being accomplished by the pathos of this voice, the dew of this throat, the redolence of this melody, and the expiration of these musical notes?'"

He said to me, "If this fellow had someone to train and tend him, and guide him in harmonious modes and various melodies, he would become a wonder and a temptation; for his nature is extraordinary, his artistry is marvelous, and he is thoroughly fragile and delicate."

Abu Sulayman suddenly interrupted, "Discuss with me what you were saying about nature. Why does it need art? We know that art imitates nature and wishes to adhere and draw nigh to it because it falls beneath it. This is a sound opinion and well-expounded proposition. Art imitates nature and follows in its track only because its level is beneath that of nature. Yet you claimed that nature did not suffice for this youth, and that it needed art so perfection might be derived from it and so that the ultimate may be attained with its assistance."

We answered, "We don't know. It is really a question."

He replied, "So give it some thought."

So we returned to him and said, "It's beyond us. If you would favor us with an explanation and embark upon expounding a useful lesson, this would be accounted a boon and supreme merit of yours."

Abu Sulayman said, "Nature needs art in the world only because here art receives dictation from soul and intellect, and it dictates to nature. And it has been ascertained that nature's level is beneath the level of soul and intellect, and that it loves soul, receives its impressions, follows its command, takes upon itself its perfection, operates by its direction, and writes by its dictation. Music advenes to the soul and is present therein in a subtle and noble manner. And if the musician happens to have a receptive nature, a responsive manner, a suitable disposition, and a pliant instrument, he pours out over it, with the aid of intellect and soul, an elegant cast and wonderful harmony, giving it a beloved form and remarkable embellishment. His faculty herein is by means of communication with the rational soul. Nature consequently needs art because it attains its perfection through the rational soul by means of skillful art, which takes by dictation what it lacks, dictating what advenes to it, seeking perfection through what it receives, bestowing perfection to what it bestows."

Al-Bukhari—he was one of his pupils—said to him, "How grateful we are to you for these resplendent gifts, and how we praise God for these constant useful lessons he gives us through you!"

Abu Sulayman said, "I have acquired this from you and have been inspired and guided by you. If the heart of one friend is open to another, the truth glows between them, the good enfolds them, and each becomes a mainstay to his companion, a helpmate in his endeavor, and

> *To deny education to any people is one of the greatest crimes against human nature. It is to deny them the means of freedom and the rightful pursuit of happiness and to defeat the very end of their being.*
>
> *—Frederick Douglass, 1894*

a potent factor in his attaining his wish. There is nothing surprising in this: souls ignite one another, minds fertilize one another, tongues exchange confidences; and the mysteries of this human being, a microcosm in this macrocosm, abound and spread."

The one who speculates in this mode must only tend his soul, seeking his felicity, concerned with his condition in proceeding to his aim, not diverting himself for conspicuous radiance, splendor of beauty, and momentary pleasure. With these premises he will reach these aims, harvest these fruits, and find this tranquility, raised beyond these particles of dust and squalor. The beginning and end of this matter are through God and from God.

Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi, *from* Borrowings. *After finishing his scribal education, al-Tawhidi joined the Baghdad circle of Abu Sulayman al-Sijistani, a philosopher seeking to combine Sufism with Greek ideas. In 985 al-Tawhidi's employer, a Buyid vizier, was executed; unable to find a new patron, al-Tawhidi was reduced to poverty. He resolved to burn his collection of books before dying, declaring, "I have no child, no friend, no pupil, no master, and would not leave my books to people who would trade with them and smirch my honor."*

Young Girl Reading, by Jean-Honoré Fragonard, c. 1769.



2004: Helena, AR

TRIAL AND ERRORS

That first semester of teaching was so relentlessly challenging that I barely recognized the cliché I was enacting: middle-class outsider visits, shudders.

I was constantly making classroom rules that I then constantly modified. Raise your hand. Don't curse. Don't put down your classmates. Don't use the word *faggot*. Don't slap—don't poke—just don't touch anybody. Never put your head down. If you put down your head for the whole class, you get a zero. For most infractions, students would get a "warning." If they got two warnings, they'd have to go to the corner, where they wrote a "reflection" or, if applicable, an apology. If they refused, I sent them to the principal. This had worked in my summer training in Houston. But the students here were older and, having been subjected to much worse punishment, didn't care. They had perfect behavior in one circumstance: when our school police officer occasionally stepped into our room. (We had no guidance counselor, no music or art teacher, no functioning library, no gymnasium, no sports teams—or any teams, for that matter—but we did have him.) His presence transformed the class: whenever he stood there in his blue uniform, his baton hanging from his belt, the kids suddenly became deeply absorbed in whatever I was trying to say. From across the room, the officer winked at me.

I began to distrust my own system. I distrusted punishment. Should a person who forgot to raise his hand suffer the same consequence—a warning—as a person who called another dumb? Shouldn't the word *faggot* trigger a collective, "kumbaya"-type discussion rather than a targeted reprimand? Distracted by issues of discipline—the police, the paddling, my own inner Mr. Hyde—I'd suddenly remember to ask myself what I actually hoped to teach. What did I want students to learn? I was an English teacher, but it seemed I could go days without thinking about a book.

A book—even the word seemed outmoded in Helena. Before school began, the Stars principal had warned me that the eighth graders were reading at a fourth- or fifth-grade level and that I, accordingly, should find appropriate "content." I either did not understand or did not want to know what this meant. So I gave my class a James Baldwin short story, and they got frustrated because the language was too hard. I gave them a speech by Malcolm X, hoping to rile them up, but it bored them. And I showed them a video of a young state senator named Barack Obama, who had just made a splash at the 2004 Democratic National Convention. "My father was a foreign student, born and raised in a small village in Kenya." Everything about Obama's speech, its historical references and its exhortations, seemed too distant for them to grasp.

> *Education is our passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs only to the people who prepare for it today.*
>
> *—Malcolm X, 1964*

What was I doing wrong? I wondered. Was it purely a matter of reading comprehension? Historical blind spots? My lack of control over the classroom? My inability to connect with them? I became afraid to share any piece of writing in the black tradition that I considered precious. If it meant nothing to them, maybe it should mean less to me. Deciding to try one last time, I introduced Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. Characters spoke to each other directly, the reading level was easier, the format—a play—was new to them, and the story centered on a black family.

It was a hit. The angry banter between Walter and Ruth, husband and wife, got laughs. Their complaints about living in a crowded house got nods. Ruth's despair over discovering she's pregnant made the room go silent. And the students universally loved the grandma: all seemed to know her. Born in Mississippi and religious, she scolded her son for wanting to start a liquor store, slapped her daughter for saying



Follow Me, by Wang Qingsong, 2003.

there is no God, and yelled at her daughter-in-law for wanting an abortion. As I assigned parts, the students clamored to be cast in her role. "She don't play," they said admiringly.

Why, I asked the students, did they think the grandma had left Mississippi to move to Chicago?

"Because there isn't much for us down here," one student said easily, and I felt vertigo at the word *us*. Others nodded in easy agreement.

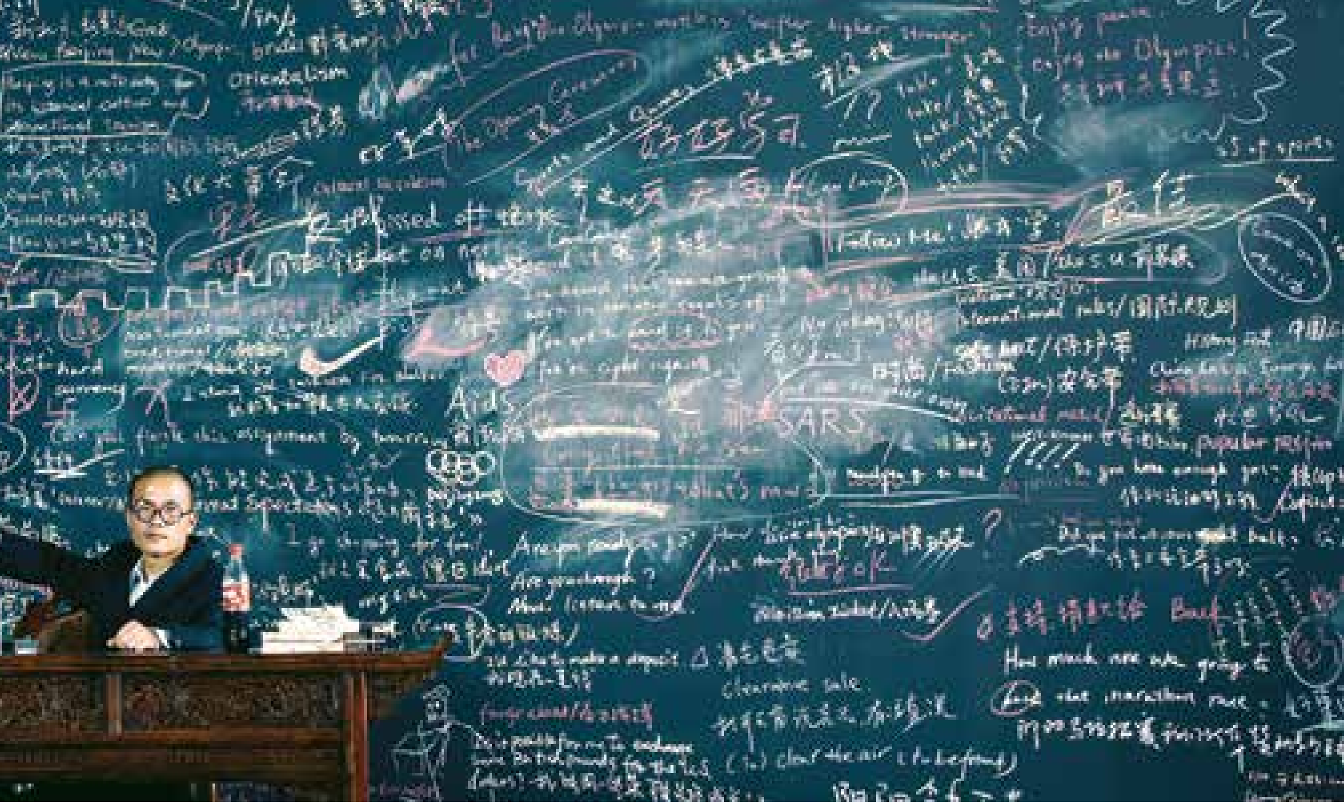
For the first time, our conversation about American history was not a strain. Usually the students were so handicapped by a lack of basic knowledge that we made no progress. They hadn't known, for instance, when slavery ended or recognized the vocabulary word *emancipation*. They hadn't known that promises to give former slaves land had been broken. They'd vaguely heard about violence against black people in the Delta, but most didn't know about the massacres of black sharecroppers who had tried to organize in our county, nor did they recognize the word *lynching*. But this one question, why a black family would leave the Delta, was not difficult for them to answer.

I talked about Helena's history of violence, which was a taboo topic—for people black and white—in town. This violence, I said, helped drive the mass migration to cities like Chicago. I talked about governments that stood by or even participated in the intimidation of black people. And I passed around a picture of a lynching, a dangling body burned and charred, its edges eerily blotted out. If my students could see how brutal the conditions were, I thought, they might find a channel for their anger and a reason for pride in the history of black resilience.

"This isn't right," said one student, looking disgusted. He passed it on. Another studied it and shook his head wordlessly. Then he, too, passed it on.

Their twin emotions, outrage and sobriety, formed for me a coherent whole. When I learned about lynching in middle school, indignation had made me feel powerful.

Then the photograph stopped at David, a spindly kid who lived with his grandmother and liked to sketch animals. He gazed at the picture and did not move. He looked as if he had stopped breathing. Then he turned over the picture and put his head down.



My neck burned; a knot grew hard in my stomach. It was against my rules to put your head down. The students watched and saw my weakness.

“If you don’t lift your head,” I said, trying to sound firm, “you’re going to get a zero.”

Finally David muttered, “Nobody want to see that.”

The moment he said it, I knew, instantly, that I had failed to understand something essential. In the tone of his voice, in the sudden change of his demeanor, he was telling me that I had crossed a line. I retrieved the photo from his desk, and even a quick glance at it made my heart skip a beat. It looked different now, something I didn’t at all recognize; some other teacher must have found it, printed it, and passed it out.

I walked to the front of the class and resumed my place at the board. I wrote some words idly, so that my back could be turned and the kids could not see my face. My chest was exploding. How could I be so casual or, worse, smug about a lynching? I had confronted them with their history, treating it like a secret whose exposure would transport them to a painful but necessary enlightenment. I’d meant to be daring and transgressive in bringing up the history of violence against black people. But maybe David and the others wanted school to be a refuge from that memory.

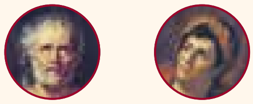
I had expected to be guilty of other things—of sentimentalizing their conditions, of patronizing them with my sympathy. But I didn’t expect to be smug. *Here, look, learn*, says the smiling teacher with mysterious motives; *learn about your history or get a zero*.

After class I put the photograph facedown in my drawer and never looked at it again.

Michelle Kuo, *from* Reading with Patrick. *In 2004 Kuo joined Teach for America, which placed her in the Mississippi Delta at an alternative school for children expelled from other public schools. She then attended Harvard Law School and worked as a student attorney at the Criminal Justice Institute in Little Rock, Arkansas. Upon learning that her former student Patrick Browning had been arrested and was awaiting trial for murder, Kuo returned to rural Arkansas to help him with his case. She later taught at the Prison University Project and the American University of Paris, where she is an associate professor.*

Social Studies

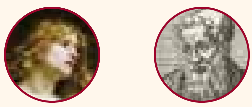
Iconic student-teacher relationships



Seneca and **Nero**

c. 50–65, Rome

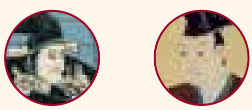
When Nero ascends to the Roman throne, he chooses his former rhetoric tutor Seneca as a leading adviser. After Nero attempts to have his own mother killed, Seneca tries to withdraw from public life, but Nero does not allow him to retire; when an assassination plot against Nero is discovered, Nero believes Seneca is involved and orders him to commit suicide.



Hypatia and **Synesius**

c. 393–413, Alexandria

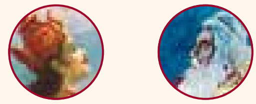
Even after converting to Christianity and becoming a bishop, Synesius keeps in contact with his former teacher, the pagan Neoplatonist philosopher Hypatia. On his deathbed he writes a letter addressing her as "my mother, sister, teacher; you who in all these relations have done good to me."



Kira Yoshinaka and **Asano Naganori**

1701, Edo

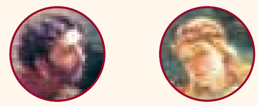
Yoshinaka, a senior shogunal master of ceremonies, is tasked with training Naganori, lord of Ako, in diplomatic etiquette before an important ceremony. Unimpressed with his student, Yoshinaka taunts Naganori, who eventually loses his temper and attacks the master. For the offense, Naganori is condemned by the shogun Tokugawa Tsunayoshi to commit seppuku.



Arjuna and **Dronacharya**

c. 3000 BC, Hastinapura

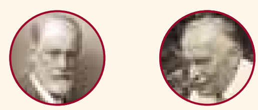
In the Mahabharata, the Pandava prince Arjuna finds himself opposing his onetime tutor Dronacharya in a dynastic struggle. Convinced by the god Krishna that defeating Dronacharya benefits the greater good, a reluctant Arjuna tricks Dronacharya into thinking his son has been killed in order to make him surrender.



Abelard and **Héloïse**

c. 1115–38, France

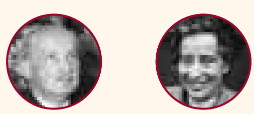
A master at the cathedral school of Notre Dame, Abelard begins an affair with his student Héloïse, the niece of a powerful clergyman who pressures the two to marry in secret when Héloïse becomes pregnant. Fearing the publicity of the marriage, Abelard forces Héloïse into a convent; her uncle has Abelard castrated in retaliation.



Sigmund Freud and **Carl Jung**

1905–13, Central Europe

An admiring Jung arranges to meet the esteemed psychologist Freud, twenty years his senior, and the two introduce Freud's theories to American audiences on a tour of the United States. Freud calls Jung "my successor and crown prince" in a 1909 letter, but three years later Freud dismisses Jung's theories as "unscientific." The two never speak again.



Martin Heidegger and **Hannah Arendt**

1925–52, Germany

As an eighteen-year-old university student, Arendt exchanges love poems and letters with Heidegger, her married professor. The correspondence continues sporadically until Heidegger joins the Nazi Party and Arendt leaves Germany as a Jewish refugee. In 1950, after seventeen years of silence, Heidegger writes to Arendt again, referring to her as his "most trusted one"; Arendt later remembers him as "a notorious liar."

1827: Hartford, CT

Trivial Pursuit

It is at present becoming a very common feeling among the teachers of female schools that there are radical and very great defects in the mode of teaching and conducting such schools.

The writer of this article has had considerable experience of the difficulties produced by these defects; and every year they have appeared more important and more trying, as every year has added new interest to the employment and new views of its importance.

This has induced the wish that these defects and difficulties might be definitely exhibited, and some inquiry instituted as to the mode of remedy.

The greatest evils incident to female schools of the higher order at the present period result from the fact that far too many and too varied duties are necessarily demanded from one person.

The amount of knowledge required to complete the education of a young lady destined to move in the higher circles, and the number of studies considered as important, has nearly doubled within the last few years.

Fifteen years ago a tolerable knowledge of grammar, geography, arithmetic, and history was considered a good education by the generality of females; and few aspired to higher advances in knowledge, except it may be in those branches usually denominated accomplishments.

At that time one person, with a suitable number of pupils and properly qualified, could, with comparative ease, *impart* the required amount of instruction. But at the present time, public opinion has altered so much on the subject of female culture that now the education of young gentlemen in college, though its branches may vary, and though it requires greater *advances*, does not embrace any greater number of pursuits than is demanded in the higher female schools.

It is a fact that *more* different branches have been pursued in one year in the school under the care of the writer than in their regular course engage the attention of young gentlemen during a four years' residence in college. By this is not intended that any *one individual* pursued such a variety of studies or that they are pursued to the same *extent* as in colleges; but only that among them all, the teachers were obliged to instruct in a greater *variety* of branches than are ever regularly pursued in any college. The following is a list of the branches pursued in the school mentioned during one year: reading, spelling, writing, composition, grammar, geography, arithmetic, chemistry, natural philosophy, history, rhetoric, moral philosophy, logic, mental philosophy, chronology, algebra, geometry, Latin, and some work of a theological nature, beside drawing, French, and music, which have had separate teachers.

> *There is nothing so stupid as an educated man, if you get off the thing he was educated in.*
> *—Will Rogers, 1931*

The education of females has generally been irregular, superficial, and deficient. A great part of the knowledge acquired in school is merely mechanical—learned by rote, without any correct ideas attached to the words repeated. And it cannot be otherwise, when almost every moment during school hours is occupied in the simple exercise of asking questions and hearing answers, without time to explain or illustrate, and without proper facilities for doing it, even were there time. It has often been a matter of astonishment to find how often some of the simplest ideas are repeated without any notion on the part of the pupil of the fact intended to be conveyed, and that, too, by young ladies of neither poor abilities nor inferior advantages.

It cannot be well understood how trying and discouraging such things are to a teacher who is interested in the employment. Yet could others witness, as teachers are called to do, the anxious inquiry after explanation for which there is neither time nor apparatus, and the bewildered look of disappointment when



Children resting in the garden at Birley House Open Air School, London, 1908.

required to commit what is not understood—could they see the teacher hastening from one pursuit to another with a speed that forbids interest or thorough instruction—could they hear the suggestion made by one friend, that this or that study needs more attention—by another, that reading or spelling must not be neglected—by another that the manners of the young ladies must receive attention—from another, admonitions respecting their moral and religious instruction, while at the same time the teachers feel that amid so many cares they *need* these admonitions and realize that these are far greater defects than others can discern—could these things be seen and felt, a better estimate would be formed of the difficulties attempted to be described.

It would appear from this statement that the new exigences of education at the present day seem to demand new and peculiar efforts for their supply. If the public sentiment has advanced so much on the subject of female culture that a course of study very similar to that pursued by young men in our public institutions is demanded for young ladies of the higher circles, should not the public afford facilities somewhat similar for accomplishing it?

Is it not desirable that females, who are to receive most of the knowledge derived from books during the period of their education, should obtain thorough and substantial knowledge instead of that parrot learning which will soon pass away?

Catharine Beecher, *from "Female Education." When Beecher was sixteen, her mother died, and she took on the upbringing of her younger siblings, including the future preacher Henry Ward Beecher, author Harriet Beecher Stowe, and suffragist Isabella Beecher Hooker. In her twenties Beecher founded two schools, the Hartford Female Seminary and the Western Female Institute. In her* Treatise on Domestic Economy, *she argued that women should be educated in and devoted to the domestic sphere, which she called "the greatest work that ever was committed to human responsibility."*

c. 1890: Vienna

TEACHING THE HABIT OF OBEDIENCE

It was taken for granted that I would go on from elementary school to grammar school. If only for the sake of social standing, every well-to-do family was anxious to have "educated" sons, who were taught English and French and familiarized with music. First governesses and then tutors were engaged to teach them good manners. But in those days of "enlightened" liberalism, only an education regarded as academic and leading to university really counted, and as a result, it was the ambition of every "good" family for at least one son to have some kind of doctoral degree. The path to university was rather a long one, and by no means a bed of roses. You had to spend five to six hours a day sitting on the wooden school bench for five years of elementary school and eight of grammar school. In your free time you did homework, and in addition you had to master the subjects required for "general culture" outside school: the living languages of French, English, and Italian, classical Greek and Latin—that is to say, five languages in all as well as geometry, physics, and the other school subjects. It was more than too much, leaving almost no time for physical exercise, sporting activities, walking, and above all none for lighthearted amusements.

The curriculum had been carefully devised on the basis of a hundred years of experience, and if inspiringly taught could have laid the foundations of a fruitful all-around cultural education. But the very fact that it was taught according to a dry-as-dust plan made the lessons themselves dry and lifeless, a cold apparatus of learning that was never adjusted to the individual and, like an automaton programmed to recite the terms *good*, *satisfactory*, *unsatisfactory*, showed only how far we met the demands of the curriculum. It was this lack of human feeling, this sober impersonality and the barracks-like atmosphere about the whole process that subconsciously embittered us.

Our teachers were not to blame for the dreariness of school life. They were neither good nor bad, they were not tyrants, but on the other hand nor were they helpful companions—they were merely poor devils who, bound like slaves to the set pattern of the officially ordained curriculum, had to do their quota of work just as we had to do ours, and—as we clearly perceived—were as glad as we were when the school bell rang at midday, setting both them and us free. They didn't like us, they didn't hate us, and why should they? They knew nothing about us; after a couple of years, they still knew very few of us by name, and in the spirit of the teaching methods of the time, they had nothing to bother about apart from establishing how many mistakes a pupil had made in his last piece of homework. They sat raised above us at the schoolmaster's lectern, we sat down below; they asked questions, and we had to answer.

> *Education and work are the levers to uplift a people. Work alone will not do it unless inspired by the right ideals and guided by intelligence. Education must not simply teach work—it must teach life.*
>
> —*W.E.B. Du Bois, 1903*

This dislike of school was not just my personal attitude; I can't remember one of my school friends who did not hate the way in which our best interests and intentions were inhibited, bored, and suppressed on the scholastic treadmill. Only much later did I realize that negligence on the part of the state authorities was not to blame for this loveless, soulless method of educating the young, but that it expressed a definite if carefully concealed intention: the world ahead of us, or set in authority over us, with its mind entirely bent on its fetish of security, did not like young people, or rather it habitually distrusted them. Proud of its systematic "progress" and good order, bourgeois society extolled leisurely moderation in all aspects of life as the sole effective human

1903: Worpswede

REPEAT THE QUESTION

Very Dear Mr. Kappus,

I have left a letter from you long unanswered. When I read it, as now, in the great quiet of these distances, I am touched by your beautiful concern about life, more even than I had felt it in Paris, where everything resounds and dies away differently because of the too great noise that makes things vibrate. Here, where an immense country lies about me, over which the winds pass coming from the seas, here I feel that no human being anywhere can answer for you those questions and feelings that deep within them have a life of their own; for even the best err in words when they are meant to mean most delicate and almost inexpressible things. But I believe nevertheless that you will not have to remain without a solution if you will hold to objects that are similar to those from which my eyes now draw refreshment. If you will cling to nature, to the simple in nature, to the little things that hardly anyone sees, and that can so unexpectedly become big and beyond measuring; if you have this love of inconsiderable things and seek quite simply, as one who serves, to win the confidence of what seems poor, then everything will become easier, more coherent, and somehow more conciliatory for you, not in your intellect, perhaps, which lags marveling behind, but in your inmost consciousness, waking, and cognizance. You are so young, so before all beginning, and I want to beg you, as much as I can, dear sir, to be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and to try to love the *questions themselves* like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. *Live* the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.

Rainer Maria Rilke, *from a letter to Franz Kappus. In 1902 Kappus was a nineteen-year-old student at an Austrian military academy when he learned that one of his professors had previously taught Rilke. Kappus decided to use the connection to write to the poet, who responded the following year. In March 2019 a new edition of* Letters to a Young Poet *was published that for the first time included Kappus' side of the seven-year-long correspondence, long thought lost but rediscovered in the private Rilke family archive.*

virtue; any haste in leading us forward was to be avoided. Austria was an old state ruled by an old emperor, governed by old ministers, a state that, having no ambition, hoped only to preserve itself intact by rejecting all radical changes in Europe. Young people, who instinctively always want such swift and radical changes, were therefore regarded as a suspect element that had to be neutralized or kept down as long as possible. So there was no reason to make our schooldays pleasant for us; we could earn any rise in the world only by waiting patiently. When everything was constantly being put off in this way, the meaning of age was quite different from what it is today. A grammar-school boy of eighteen was treated like a child, punished if he was caught smoking a cigarette, had to put up a docile hand if he wanted to leave his place in class to answer the call of nature. Even a man of thirty was still considered immature, and a forty-year-old was not yet regarded as ready for a position of responsibility.

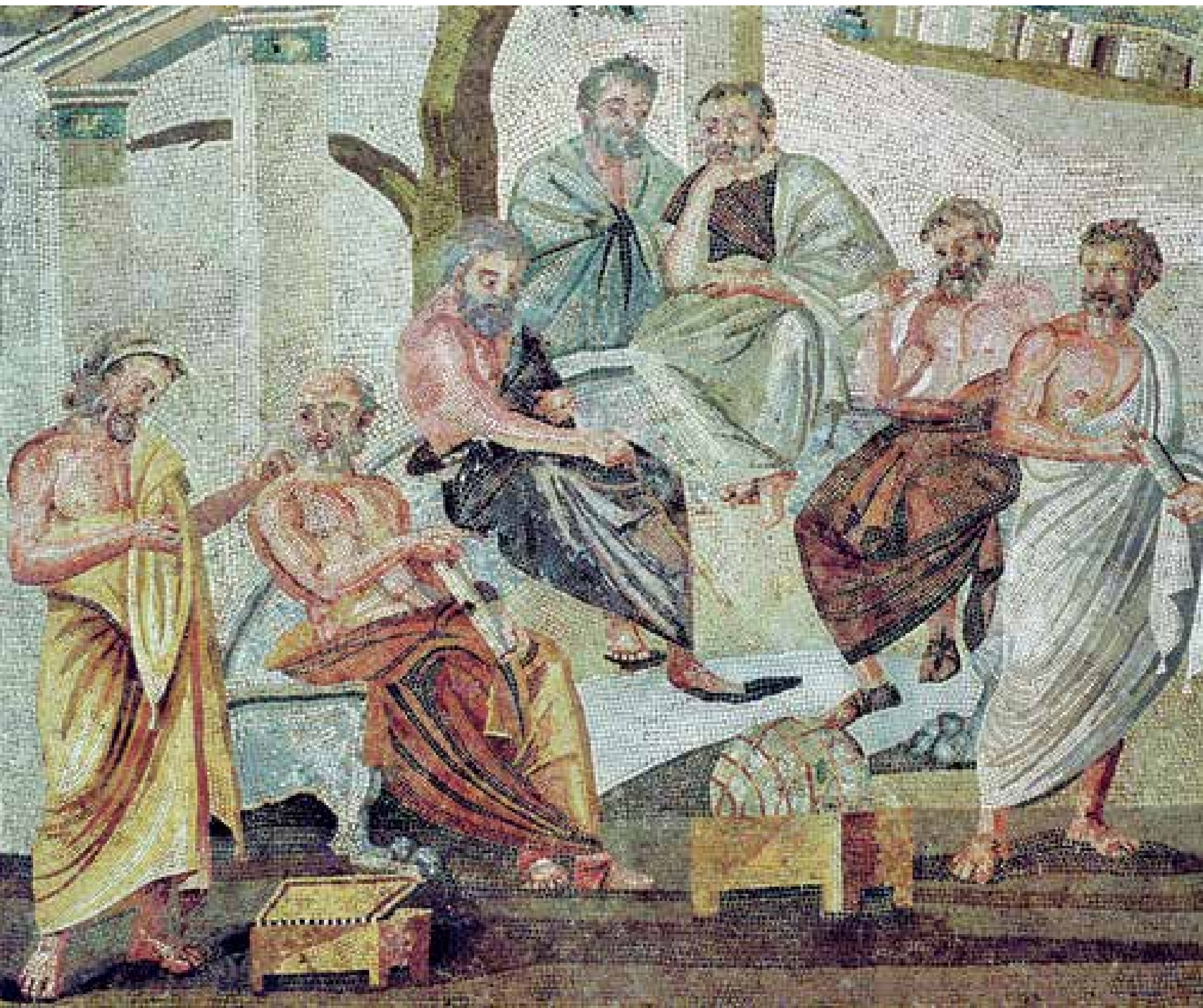
Only that odd attitude can explain the way the state exploited its schools as an instrument for maintaining its authority. Above all, we were to be brought up to respect the status quo as perfect, our teachers' opinions as infallible, a father's word as final, brooking no contradiction, and state institutions as absolute and valid for all eternity. A second cardinal principle of educational theory, one that was also adopted in the family, was that young people should not have too easy a time. Before they were allowed rights of any kind, they were supposed to learn that they had duties, above all the duty of total obedience. From the first, it was to be impressed upon us that we had not yet done anything in life, we had no experience, we must be grateful for anything we were allowed, and we had no right to ask questions or make demands. In my day, this stupid method of intimidation was applied from early childhood on. Maidservants and silly mothers would terrify children of three or four by threatening to fetch "the policeman" if they didn't stop being naughty at once. Even as grammar-school boys, if we brought home a bad mark in some unimportant subject, we were

threatened with being taken away from school and sent to learn a trade—returning to the proletariat being the worst threat imaginable in bourgeois society—and if young people, in an honest desire for education, sought enlightenment from adults on the serious problems of the day, they were fobbed off with a lofty "You wouldn't understand that yet."

This technique was used everywhere—at home, at school, by the state. It was always being impressed on a boy that he was not grown up yet, didn't understand anything, had no option but to listen, believing all he was told, although he must never join in a discussion himself, let alone contradict anyone. For the same reason the poor devil of a teacher at his high lectern at school was to remain unapproachable and aloof, restricting all our thoughts and endeavors to the curriculum. It made no difference whether we were happy at school or not. The sole purpose of school in the spirit of those times was not so much to bring us on as to hold us back, not to help us to shape our minds but to fit us into the established mold with as little resistance as possible, not to enhance our energies but to discipline them and level them out.

Such psychological, or rather unpsychological, pressure on the young can take effect in only one of two ways—it will either paralyze or stimulate them. The case histories in psychoanalysts' files show us how many inferiority complexes are the result of this absurd method of education; it may be no coincidence that the inferiority complex was revealed by men who

Mosaic of Plato's Academy, Pompeii, first century BC.





Statutes of the University of Paris, produced and granted by papal legate Robert de Courson, 1215.

had been through our old Austrian schools themselves. Myself, I owe to that pressure a passion for freedom that manifested itself early, one that the youth of today can hardly feel to the same extent, and with it a hatred for all that is authoritarian, all dictums issued from on high, and it has accompanied me all my life. Over the years my aversion to everything dogmatically established has become purely instinctive, and I had almost forgotten where it came from. But one day, when I was on a lecture tour and found out that I was to speak in the great auditorium of a university, standing at a raised lectern while the audience occupied benches below just as we schoolboys used to, I was suddenly overcome by uneasiness. I remembered how I had suffered all through my schooldays from being addressed from on high in that unfriendly, authoritarian, doctrinaire manner, and I was overwhelmed by a fear that speaking from a raised lectern might make me seem just as impersonal as our teachers did in the past. My sense of inhibition made that lecture the worst I ever gave.

Stefan Zweig, *from* The World of Yesterday. *Zweig published his first book, a volume of poetry, at nineteen and studied philosophy at the University of Vienna. Conscripted after the outbreak of World War I, he was assigned to work in the Austrian war archive; his experiences there made him a staunch pacifist, advocating a borderless cosmopolitanism. His books were banned in Germany when Hitler came to power; after a 1934 raid on his home, Zweig left Austria for London, ultimately settling in Brazil, where he and his wife died by suicide in 1942.*

1961: Havana

REVISION PROCESS

The problem of revolution and education can be viewed from the theoretical and practical point of view. There can be no revolution without education, because a revolution means profound changes in the life of a country. The first problem for the revolution concerns the fight and defeat of the old ideas and traditions and prejudices. The revolutionary ideas must make headway and become understood by the people. Previously, there were many topics that could not be discussed. Certain concepts had acquired the character of a dogma that could not be questioned.

The revolution questioned all these dogmas and conventional truths that we would better call lies. The revolution started with a revision of all these lies. Any citizen may compare what he knew before January 1959 with what he knows now. He will have to admit to having learned much during the last two years—above all, because of the speed involved in the learning process during a revolution. We who have had the responsibility for the revolutionary process would also have to admit that we have learned very much.

When we started the armed fight, virtually none of us had any knowledge. We have learned much from experience. Our experience today, after having solved many problems, is very much greater than it was at the start, but we had goodwill and sincerely wished to comply with our duty. On the other hand, there is no university career specializing in government, because government is such a difficult and complete matter. Many times the government in our country was in the hands of people who did not lack education but integrity—unscrupulous politicians who controlled the government and who did not know the problems and did not want to solve them. At least we had the intention of solving these problems in the hope that we would gain experience in the process.

We have tried to enrich the people's experience with our own, and we have learned from the people. We have learned much more from the people than we have taught to them. We have learned much merely by talking to physicians, teachers, workers, and farmers in respect to the apprehensions, wishes, and aspirations of the people.

The masses of the people have acquired political knowledge that they did not have prior to the revolution. The people were very ignorant of international problems. We got our information only from North American news agencies and North American magazines and books. Our newspapers were at the service of North American interests.

> *If you are truly serious about preparing your child for the future, don't teach him to subtract—teach him to deduct.*
>
> *—Fran Lebowitz, 1981*

Prior to the revolution, the worker was told to believe; he had no access to books. The revolution tells the people "read," because this is the road of the truth. The poor people in the rural areas had not the slightest chance of an education. The children of worker families in rural areas could not attend secondary schools. The workers of all Cuban towns could not send their sons to college. Many professionals who were educated at the university have left their profession to go into other fields. The revolution has wanted to give primary schools to all parts of the country. Most of the teachers came from the towns. Normal schools were in the main towns. The students of these schools were town people. People from the working or middle class of the towns studied at the teachers college. There were not enough teachers for the mountain areas. We asked for volunteers to teach in the mountain areas and had several thousand applicants whom we tested in the mountain ranges. Then we decided to establish teachers colleges in the mountain area. Normal school students will not need to ask their

Course Credits

A sampling of classes taught by notable figures

DIRECTORY BY DEPARTMENT
A|B|C|D|E|F|G|H|I|J|K|L|M|N|O|P|Q|R|S|T|U|V|W|X|Y|Z

AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

Instructor: Toni Morrison

Studies in American Africanism

Princeton University, 1989–95

The same year she arrived at Princeton, Morrison began offering this application-only seminar on the concept of Blackness in American literature. "The discussion is so focused," a *New York Times* reporter wrote of the class in 1993, "that the students in Wednesday's seminar talked about *Moby Dick* for two and a half hours and never even once mentioned the whale."

ASTRONOMY

Instructor: Carl Sagan

Critical Thinking in Science and Non-Science Contexts

Cornell University, 1986

"Think about love. Think about international relationships. In an age of nuclear weapons, clearly non-zero-sum thinking must be encouraged," the astronomer wrote in his notes for a seminar session on zero-sum games. "Also, consider my scheme of having one dolphin teach a language to another dolphin with rewards for both every time something is successfully communicated."

ENGLISH

Instructor: David Foster Wallace

Literary Interpretation

Pomona College, 2005

The novelist's seven-page syllabus ends with a list of reasons a student might "plausibly decide not to remain enrolled" in Wallace's section of the course. "I will not accept sloppy, rough-draftish, or semiliterate college writing," one reads. "I am absolutely not kidding. If you won't or can't devote significant time and attention to your written work, I urge you to drop English 67-02 and save us both a lot of grief."

GEOGRAPHY

Instructor: Immanuel Kant

Physical Geography

Königsberg, 1757–96

While attempting to secure a post at the local university, the Prussian philosopher began offering this course as a private tutor; by the time he retired, he had taught it forty-nine times. Lecture topics included the history of the oceans, the history of wind currents, and the "history of the great changes that the earth has suffered and is still suffering."

LANGUAGE

Instructor: Vladimir Nabokov

Russian Literature in Translation

Wellesley College, 1946–47

In 1977 *The New Yorker* published a former student's recollections of Nabokov's two-semester survey class. "Mister Nabokov told us he had graded the Russian writers, and we must write down their grades in our notebooks and learn them by heart: Tolstoy was A-plus. Pushkin and Chekhov were A. Turgenev A-minus. Gogol was B-minus. And Dostoevsky was C-minus."

POLITICAL SCIENCE

Instructor: Hannah Arendt

On Revolutions

Northwestern University, 1961

Two years before publishing her similarly titled book, Arendt taught this seminar on "the sources of revolution; the problems of a new order of things and a new constitution; the revolutionary spirit." She concluded the course's final exam by asking students, "The American Revolution—was there any?"

DIRECTORY BY SUBJECT A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K | L | M | N | O | P | Q | R | S | T | U | V | W | X | Y | Z

families for support. Any son of a worker or a farmer can be a teacher. The government gives him a scholarship and his expense.

At the same time, we have undertaken a university reform that will make our universities the best in the hemisphere. We have already more than a thousand scholarship students, and lodging facilities in Havana alone for 3,500 scholarship students. Any Cuban who has the vocation and ability can undertake a university career.

Fidel Castro, *from "Education and Revolution." In early 1959 pro-American dictator Fulgencio Batista fled Cuba in the wake of decisive victories by Castro's revolutionary forces. Castro then forced American interests off the island, redistributed confiscated farmland to more than two hundred thousand peasants, and executed as many as five hundred Batista officials by the end of the year. In response to American criticisms, Castro estimated that his forces had taken the lives of "about one assassin for every thousand men, women, and children assassinated in Hiroshima and Nagasaki."*

1931: Edinburgh

STUPID AS EVER

The term opened vigorously as usual. Miss Brodie stood bronzed before her class and said, "I have spent most of my summer holidays in Italy once more, and a week in London, and I have brought back a great many pictures which we can pin on the wall. Here is a Cimabue. Here is a larger formation of Mussolini's Fascisti, it is a better view of them than that of last year's picture. They are doing splendid things, as I shall tell you later. I went with my friends for an audience with the pope. My friends kissed his ring, but I thought it proper only to bend over it. I wore a long black gown with a lace mantilla and looked magnificent. In London my friends who are well-to-do—their small girl has two nurses, or nannies as they say in England—took me to visit A.A. Milne. In the hall was hung a reproduction of Botticelli's *Primavera*, which means 'The Birth of Spring.' I wore my silk dress with the large red poppies which is just right for my coloring. Mussolini is one of the greatest men in the world, far more so than Ramsay MacDonald, and his Fascisti——"

"Good morning, Miss Brodie. Good morning, sit down, girls," said the headmistress, who had entered in a hurry, leaving the door wide open.

Miss Brodie passed behind her with her head up, up, and shut the door with the utmost meaning.

"I have only just looked in," said Miss Mackay, "and I have to be off. Well, girls, this is the first day of the new session. Are we downhearted? No. You girls must work hard this year at every subject and pass your qualifying examination with flying colors. Next year you will be in the senior school, remember. I hope you've all had a nice summer holiday, you all look nice and brown. I hope in due course of time to read your essays on how you spent them."

When she had gone, Miss Brodie looked hard at the door for a long time. A girl, not of her set, called Judith, giggled. Miss Brodie said to Judith, "That will do." She turned to the blackboard and rubbed out with her duster the long division sum she always kept on the blackboard in case of intrusions from outside during any arithmetic period when Miss Brodie should happen not to be teaching arithmetic. When she had done this, she turned back to the class and said, "Are we downhearted no, are we downhearted no. As I was saying, Mussolini has performed feats of magnitude, and unemployment is even further abolished under him than it was last year. I shall be able to tell you a great deal this term. As you know, I don't believe in talking down to children, you are capable of grasping more than is generally appreciated by your elders. Education means a leading out, from *e*, out, and *duco*, I lead. Qualifying examination or no qualifying examination, you will have the benefit of my experiences in Italy. In Rome I saw the Forum, and I saw the Colosseum where the gladiators died and the slaves were thrown to the lions. A vulgar American remarked to me, 'It looks like a mighty fine quarry.' They talk nasally. Mary, what does to talk nasally mean?"

> *Education is what survives when what has been learned has been forgotten.*
> —*B.F. Skinner, 1964*

Mary did not know.

"Stupid as ever," said Miss Brodie. "Eunice?"

"Through your nose," said Eunice.

"Answer in a complete sentence, please," said Miss Brodie. "This year I think you should all start answering in complete sentences, I must try to remember this rule. Your correct answer is 'To talk nasally means to talk through one's nose.' The American said, 'It looks like a mighty fine quarry.' Ah! It was there the gladiators fought. 'Hail Caesar!' they cried. 'These about to die salute thee!'"

Miss Brodie stood in her brown dress like a gladiator with raised arm and eyes flashing

like a sword. "Hail Caesar!" she cried again, turning radiantly to the window light, as if Caesar sat there. "Who opened the window?" said Miss Brodie dropping her arm.

Nobody answered.

"Whoever has opened the window has opened it too wide," said Miss Brodie. "Six inches is perfectly adequate. More is vulgar. One should have an innate sense of these things. We ought to be doing history at the moment, according to the timetable. Get out your history books and prop them up in your hands. I shall tell you a little more about Italy. I met a young poet by a fountain. Here is a picture of Dante meeting Beatrice—it is pronounced *Beatrichay* in Italian, which makes the name very beautiful—on the Ponte Vecchio. He fell in love with her at that moment. Mary, sit up and don't slouch. It was a sublime moment in a sublime love. By whom was the picture painted?"

Nobody knew.

"It was painted by Rossetti. Who was Rossetti, Jenny?"

"A painter," said Jenny.

Miss Brodie looked suspicious.

1442: Ferrara

COLLEGE TOWN

A supplication was directed to the illustrious and mighty prince Leonello, marquis of Este, etc., and our exceptional lord, from a number of the most respected and prudent citizens of Ferrara, in which they suggested to that prince an outstanding boon for this his city, that he reform its university and give to the shade of this school a true and living form. In conformity to the command of the prince, the wise men and citizens were called together. Joannes de Gualengis, the judge, sagely explained the petition and the response of the prince and then asked the advice of these wise men and citizens whether there should be a university in this town and whether it would pay the city. And these wise men and citizens, having heard the judge's polished statement, were all of this one mind: that a university be established in this city, which step would be of the greatest utility, praise, and honor.

To begin with its utility, strangers will flock hither from various remote regions, and many scholars will stay here, live upon our bread and wine, and purchase of us clothing and other necessities for human existence, will leave their money in the city and not depart hence without great gain to all of us. Moreover, our citizens who go elsewhere to acquire an education and take their money there will have an academy at home where they can learn without expense, and our money will not fly away. Besides, there are many excellent wits in this town of ours that remain undeveloped and lost, whether from the carelessness of their fathers or their own negligence or lack of money. These will be aroused by the presence of a university and the conveniences for study, and will be enabled to pursue their education without great expense. What praise, what honor there will be for our city when the report shall spread through the whole world that we have our own seat of good disciplines and arts. Great indeed and one sought by every city, should opportunity offer. But since fortune, or rather God Almighty himself, has furnished us the occasion, in this time when other university cities are either shattered by wars or weakened by other ills, that our city flourishes and lives in peace under the lead of our most wise and divine prince, what is there to persuade us that we defraud this our city in this matter of utility, praise, and honor? In view of which reasons and many others brought forward by the aforesaid as above assembled, it is decreed and established: that a university be set up in this city, and may it be a great success.

From the records of the city of Ferrara. In 1391 Pope Boniface IX granted the University of Ferrara the authority to award degrees in law, medicine, theology, and the arts, but over the following decades the university was repeatedly forced to suspend operations due to a lack of funds. In 1418 the community government of Ferrara attempted to reopen the university but refused to increase the taxes required to pay for it. In 1442, with the support of Leonello d'Este, lord of Ferrara, the city council successfully reestablished the university; a meat tax was levied to pay for salaries.



Education of Pantagruel, illustration by Gustave Doré from an 1873 edition of François Rabelais' *Gargantua*.

"And a genius," said Sandy, to come to Jenny's rescue.

"A friend of—?" said Miss Brodie.

"Swinburne," said a girl.

Miss Brodie smiled. "You have not forgotten," she said, looking around the class. "Holidays or no holidays. Keep your history books propped up in case we have any further intruders." She looked disapprovingly toward the door and lifted her fine, dark Roman head with dignity. She had often told the girls that her dead Hugh had admired her head for its Roman appearance.

"Next year," she said, "you will have the specialists to teach you history and mathematics and languages, a teacher for this and a teacher for that, a period of forty-five minutes for this and another for that. But in this your last year with me, you will receive the fruits of my prime. They will remain with you all your days."

Muriel Spark, *from* The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie. *Born in Edinburgh in 1918, Spark attended James Gillespie's High School from the ages of eleven to seventeen. One of her teachers, Christina Kay, inspired the title character of this novel. "Little did I know that she bore within her the seeds of the future Miss Jean Brodie," Spark wrote in her autobiography. "In a sense Miss Kay was nothing like Miss Brodie. In another sense she was far above and beyond her Brodie counterpart. If she could have met Miss Brodie, Miss Kay would have put the fictional character firmly in her place."*

1789: Jena

PROTECTION RACKET

The realm of history is fertile and comprehensive; it embraces the whole moral world. It accompanies man through everything he experiences, through all the changing forms of thought, through his folly and wisdom, his depravity and glory; it must render the account of everything he has given and received. There is no one among you to whom history does not have something important to say. However different the paths of your future vocations, somewhere they will link up with history. But one vocation you have in common, the task that you brought with you into the world: to cultivate yourselves as men—and it is just to men that history speaks.

What does education often do? It makes a straight-cut ditch of a free, meandering brook.
—Henry David Thoreau, 1850

But, gentlemen, before I can undertake to determine more exactly your expectations of this field of study and to discuss its connection with the proper purpose of your various studies, it is not superfluous for us to come to an understanding about what this purpose is. Quite different are the plans of study that the bread-and-butter scholar and the philosopher lay out for themselves. The one and only concern of the former is to satisfy the conditions by which he can qualify for an appointment and enjoy its rewards; he puts his intellectual ability to work only in order to improve his material position and to gratify his petty craving for recognition. Such a man embarks on an academic career with no more important concern than to separate as completely as possible the fields of study that he calls "professional" from all those which attract the intellect purely for their own sake. Every moment spent on the latter he counts as taken away from his future profession and never forgives himself this theft. All his diligence is focused on the demands made of him by the future master of his fate, and he believes he has done all there is to be done when, having qualified, he is no longer afraid of him. When he has skimmed through his course of study and reached his goal, he gets rid of his study guides—for what good are they anymore? His greatest concern now is to show off his accumulated pearls of wisdom, and to make sure by all means that they are not devalued. Every extension of his discipline is disquieting, because it costs him new work or makes his past work useless. Every important innovation frightens him, for it destroys the old schooling that he acquired with such labor; all the work of his past life is put in danger of being lost. Who has protested reforms more than the company of bread-and-butter scholars? Who more than they has impeded the progress of salutary revolutions in the realm of learning? Any light that by the good fortune of talent is kindled in any field of knowledge makes their shabbiness visible. They oppose it bitterly, maliciously, desperately, because in defending the academic system, they are fighting for their lives. Therefore there is no more implacable enemy than a bread-and-butter scholar, no more envious colleague, no one readier to brand dissent as heresy. The less satisfying his scholarship is to him in itself, the greater his demand for external rewards; he measures the merit of the manual laborer and of the intellectual alike by the amount of toil expended. Therefore no one complains more about the thanklessness of his work than a bread-and-butter scholar; he expects his reward not in the currency of ideas but in reputation, in preferment, and in tenure. Who is more unhappy than a bread-and-butter scholar who is disappointed in these hopes? He has lived, watched, and worked in vain; in vain he has sought truth, if truth is not convertible into gold, into celebrity, or into the favor of princes.

How pitiable the man who wants and makes nothing higher with the noblest tools, science and art, than what a day laborer does with the most common! Who in the realm of perfect freedom carries with him the soul of a slave! More pitiable still is the young man of ability whose promising career is diverted into this dismal byway as a result of pernicious



Cast metal sculpture molds of the lama Tsongkapa, Himalayan, nineteenth century.

teaching and example, who allows himself to be persuaded to rally to this wretched narrowness as his future profession.

How entirely differently does the philosopher conduct himself! As carefully as the bread-and-butter scholar keeps his discipline clear of everything extraneous, so the philosopher endeavors to expand his, and to restore its connections with the others—I say "restore," because one discipline has been distinguished from another only by boundaries created by the analytic understanding. Where the bread-and-butter scholar puts asunder, the philosopher joins together. He has early reached the conviction that in the realm of understanding, as in the domain of sensation, everything is interconnected, and his active drive for coherence cannot remain satisfied with fragments. All his efforts are directed toward perfecting his knowledge; in divine discontent he cannot rest until he has ordered all his ideas into a coherent whole, until he locates himself in the exact center of his art, of his science, and from this vantage point surveys with satisfaction its territory. New discoveries in the field of his activity, which are disheartening to the bread-and-butter scholar, delight the philosophical mind. Perhaps they fill a gap that had disfigured the developing totality of his ideas, or fit the last, still missing stone into the edifice of his ideas and complete it. But on the other hand, should they demolish it—should a new set of ideas, or a new natural phenomenon, or a newly discovered physical law lay waste the structure of his discipline—yet truth is dearer to him than his system, and he will gladly exchange the old, defective model for a new and more pleasing one. Indeed, even if no external blow shakes his edifice, he himself, compelled by a ceaselessly operating drive for improvement, is the first to take it apart in order to put it together again more perfectly. Through ever new and ever more gratifying forms of thought, the philosophical spirit advances to greater excellence, while the bread-and-butter scholar, in eternal paralysis of spirit, stands guard over the barren monotony of his scholasticism.

Friedrich Schiller, *from "The Nature and Value of Universal History." After Schiller published his history of the Eighty Years' War in 1788, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe recommended him for a position at the University of Jena. Schiller, then twenty-nine, accepted the job without a salary, reasoning that, because of "how eagerly professors of name are sought after now," he would make more from accepting students' fees directly. So many students attended his inaugural lecture that the university's largest lecture hall could not accommodate all of them.*


ER HOUSE.

HOMEWORK

2022: San Francisco

HOW CAN WE HELP?

Leslie Hu remembers the very day, a Thursday in March 2020, when her school, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Academic Middle School, received word from the district office that Friday would be the last day the school would be physically open until further notice, because of the coronavirus epidemic. Without waiting for guidance, she and a few other staff members "immediately went into overdrive to connect with as many families as possible," she tells me.

Working late into the evening, the staff members made "wellness calls" to deliver messages of care and reassurance. "Our message was 'We are not abandoning you. What do you need? We still care,'" recalls Hu, a community-school coordinator and social worker.

The next day, they enlarged the circle of callers to include other staff members. By the following Wednesday, their wellness calls had reached nearly all of the 460 families with children at the school.

The outreach effort then expanded to more in-depth interview calls to stay connected to families handling the emergency. Within a month, they had reached out to every family.

Their efforts yielded critical information about how families were affected by the pandemic and what kinds of challenges they faced—such as whether a breadwinner had lost a job, whether the household had access to the internet, or whether the family was facing eviction. They also conveyed critical information to help families navigate the crisis, including how to pick up Wi-Fi hot spots and devices from the district; where there were open food pantries; and which local nonprofit organizations and community agencies were providing support for those dealing with financial difficulties and mental health issues.

"We knew there would be certain things our families probably needed," Hu recalls. "But we didn't make assumptions. We knew to ask open-ended questions."

This outreach effort was so successful that, according to an article by the California Federation of Teachers, the San Francisco Board of Education used it as a model to create a district-wide plan to establish permanent "coordinated care teams" for reaching out to families and checking on their well-being.

In the Laboratory, by Henry Alexander, c. 1885.

Looking back, Hu describes their response as something that came about intuitively. She and her colleagues didn't wait for directives from higher-ups. Instead, they relied on a well-practiced behavior of "cocreating," as she put it, with colleagues in a school where leadership responsibilities are shared rather than hierarchical.

The actions Hu and her colleagues took are not unique—stories of educators and staff members rising to address the challenges of the coronavirus pandemic abound. But rarely do these reports delve into what took place before the crisis began. They do not mention, for example, whether there was a particular culture inculcated among staff members that guided how they responded, or whether there were structures and systems put in place beforehand that were set in motion when the crisis emerged.

> *Education is the leading of human souls to what is best.*
>
> *—John Ruskin, 1853*

"The work that led to our wellness calls was due to an effort that took years," Hu says, referring to the school's decision in 2014 to transform its culture and operations to align with an approach known widely as community schools.

As Hu explains, "All the work the model requires you to do to build systems and structure to communicate with families paid off."

So far in 2022, media outlets have promoted a narrative that the bonds between families and their public schools have become more strained than ever before, and that parents have taken on a more adversarial relationship with schools. Hu's school, and others like it that are guided by the community-school model, may show what a successful relationship between parents and schools could look like.

When Hu was studying for a master's degree in social work, she became motivated to work with families in settings where they felt most comfortable, which she felt would be in the schools. Seeking her first job as a social worker, she tried the San Francisco school district, and fortunately, it was hiring.

Hu "became riveted" with community schools because, she says, their approach builds "the infrastructure that embeds values in the fabric of the school."

What are some of those values? One, Hu maintained, is the importance of making sure kids feel they're cared for. Another is to cultivate a culture of listening to students and families, and then building and attending to a system that promotes ongoing communication among the school, the families, and the surrounding community.

That may sound easy, but it's not. "It's a shift in thinking about…families having a partnership role in the school," Hu says. "It's about having the mind-set to be attuned to the needs of the whole child and have a community culture that supports this. This mind-set has to be cultivated."

Paula Oxoby-Hayett, a community-school coordinator at Enos Garcia Elementary School in Taos, New Mexico, echoes a similar belief when she describes the strengths her school had that helped it weather the Covid-19 storm.

"There's a tendency to want to jump in with solutions," she says. "But it's important to come to conversations with fresh eyes and open ears. And people with skin in the game must be part of any solution."

Though her school, located in a small town, has concerns and interests that may differ greatly from those of a school in a big city like San Francisco, Oxoby-Hayett's description of the family-engagement process entailed in the community-school approach closely matches what Hu describes.

When Oxoby-Hayett's school chose to take up the community-school model in 2019, it took the customary first step of conducting an assessment that included reaching out to parents via emails, texts, and phone calls.

"Teachers don't always have time to have these sorts of conversations with parents, to ask families, 'What's your vision?'" Oxoby-Hayett explains. But the community-school

approach puts in place an on-site coordinator and the structures for enabling those conversations to take place.

In the needs assessment, Oxoby-Hayett recalls, "We made a conscientious effort to ask, 'How would you like to contribute?'" What they heard was that parents wanted to be more engaged in the daily workings of the school.

Consequently, she adds, "Our approach has been to build from within. We don't have the [external] infrastructure to lean on, so we have to build it ourselves."

Ultimately what that entailed was to match parents' desire for more engagement with opportunities to volunteer for the school. Currently one parent is teaching Spanish in the after-school program. A student's dad is coaching soccer. One student's uncle is coaching basketball, and another's mom runs the Spanish club.

The school also enlisted parents and community members to serve as "family navigators," who help make calls to families to check in with them, distribute devices for connecting to the internet, and make sure families have books and other materials they need.

The family navigators proved to be indispensable sources for outreach and parent contact when the pandemic struck.

"Community schools…are about system transformation," Anne Egan, a consultant working with schools in Truth or Consequences, New Mexico, says.

Truth or Consequences, a town of fewer than ten thousand people, is situated on the Rio Grande, in the southeastern part of the state.

Sierra County "has been losing jobs and population for two decades," she tells me. Substance-use disorders, as well as high incarceration rates, are rife in the community. The county's poverty rate is 22 percent, well above the state's overall rate of 18 percent.

"In the fall of 2020, we were struggling to connect with families" that were reluctant to return to in-person learning, Egan recalls. When nearly eighty students did not show up when schools reopened, the principal and the community-school coordinator called, texted,

2022: New York City

THE OMICRON CURRICULUM

I arrived at school and promptly went to study hall. Today there were fourteen absent teachers because of Covid-19 during first period.

Second period I had another absent teacher. It was around this time that 25 percent of kids, including myself, realized that there were no rules being enforced outside of attendance at the start of the period, and that cutting class was ridiculously easy. We left—there was functionally no learning occurring within study hall, and health conditions were safer outside of the auditorium. It was well beyond max capacity.

Third period I had a normal class period. Hooray! First thing the teacher did was pass out Covid tests because we had all been close contacts to a Covid-positive student in our class. Four more teachers would pass out Covid tests throughout the day, which were to be taken at home. The school started running low on tests, and rules had to be refined to ration.

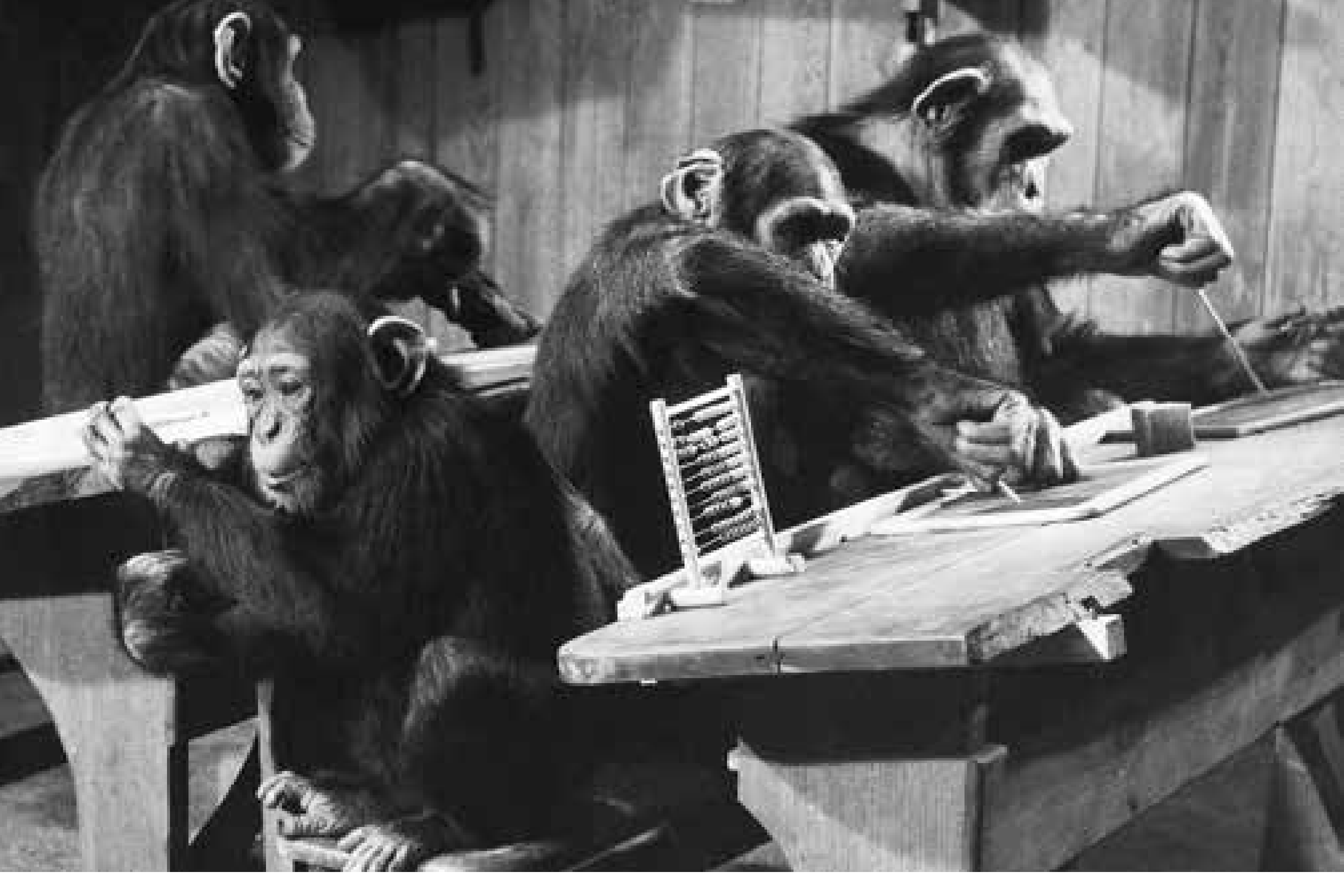
"To be taken at home." Ya…students don't listen. Ninety percent of the bathrooms were full of students swabbing their noses and taking their tests. I had one kid ask me—with his mask down, by the way—whether a "faint line was positive," proceeding to show me his positive Covid test. I told him to go to the nurse. One student tested positive IN THE AUDITORIUM, and a few students started screaming and ran away from him.

I should note that in study hall and with subs we literally learn nothing. I spent about three hours sitting around today doing nothing.

Ninety percent of the conversations spoken by students concern Covid. It has completely taken over any function of daily school life.

One teacher flat out left his class five minutes into the lesson and didn't return because he was developing symptoms and didn't believe it safe to spread to his class.

From a Reddit post on r/nyc. New York City public schools had fully reopened by September 2021; the city's Omicron surge started in December and peaked in January of this year. An anonymous high school student wrote this post on January 6, calling for "a temporary return to remote learning" even though it had been "absolutely detrimental to the mental health of myself, my friends, and my peers." In an interview with Slate, the student explained that "with the sheer volume of cases, it makes it impossible for there to be actual learning conditions at school."



Chimpanzees in a classroom.

and emailed every family and then began going door-to-door.

The message to families, Egan says, was consistent: "We know this is hard. What are your problems? How can we help?" Eventually, the missing students came back before head counts had to be sent to the state to secure the school's per-pupil funding.

Through her work helping schools implement the community-school approach, Egan has learned that there has to be shared leadership, in which stakeholders in the school and the surrounding community are represented and the focus is on creating equity-based opportunity.

"This goes against the old, bureaucratic ways of running schools," she says. "It takes time, and it's hard, but it's how the magic happens."

In the old way of doing school, teachers, by default, served as frontline staff, providing mental and physical health services. But partnerships that develop in the community-school approach create a synergy that relieves teachers of that work and keeps them focused on what they do best—teaching.

Finally, according to Egan, there has to be trust. Local school councils should be open for a wide spectrum of people to participate. People need to be invited to help with school operations and programs. Schools should ask people what they want and then listen to them. They should show they care about students by including them in meetings and conversations.

Then, over time, trust comes about when people see that a school has a history of saying what it is going to do and then doing it.

Jeff Bryant, *from an article in* The Progressive. *Bryant's reporting focuses on investigating charter schools, voucher programs, and other school-privatization efforts. According to a 2020 study by the RAND Corporation, New York City public schools that adopted the community-school model saw declines in absenteeism and disciplinary incidents and increases in on-time grade progression and high school graduation rates. The Biden administration has proposed increasing funding for community-school programs by $400 million; California has launched an effort to spend $3 billion to convert thousands of schools to the model.*

c. 1846: Rome

WORK HARD, PLAY HARD

At length, stepping timidly along from word to word, like one who crosses a brook upon stones slippery and uneven, I began to parse and to construe. I mastered by turns verses, psalms, and chapters. I became ambitious of surprising Berto by the rapidity of my progress. I determined that my knowledge should one day equal if not surpass his own. How far I might have gone in my rabbinical career, it was now not easy to determine, for in the full tide of my enthusiasm, I was checked and thrown back by the perverse will of Berto. But for him, I should never have known the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet—but for him, I might have become the most learned pundit of my day.

I had passed a month in severe study and fully intended to devote many more to my new pursuits. I sat one evening in my quiet room, with my books and papers strewn about me—a weary frown was on my brow, for I was endeavoring from my tired brain to weave anew the broken tracery of the timeworn language. Suddenly, a well-known laugh interrupted my labors, a firm grasp was laid upon my shoulder, and Berto saluted me with these uncourteous words: "Will you have done with all that?"

"What do you mean, Berto? I am committing the Decalogue to memory, in preparation for tomorrow's lecture."

"Take my advice and leave it alone. A little of it is well enough—Moses was a man of genius in his way, but too much behind the present day to occupy our attention for any length of time. Come! Our month of eastern exile is over now, and I am glad of it. Long and tedious has it seemed to me—here, let us drink to our return to civilized life."

As he spoke he uncorked a bottle of unquestionable Lachryma Christi and compelled me to join him in a pious libation to the shades of David, Solomon, Judas Maccabeus, *et autres*.

"Dear old barbarians!" he cried, holding up his glass to the light. "The study of you has been so dry that rivers of wine must flow to lay your learned dust. Here's to your endless health, and to a year's separation from you!"

"I suppose you will explain all this, Berto," I said, "but to me it seems the strangest of all your strange caprices to have entered suddenly upon pursuits of such gravity, to relinquish them as suddenly and before we can have derived any benefit from them. If it is thus that you propose to direct my studies, I can only regret that I ever consented to put myself under your guidance."

> *Much education today is monumentally ineffective. All too often we are giving our young people cut flowers when we should be teaching them to grow their own plants.*
> *—John W. Gardner, 1963*

"Ingrate," replied Berto. "Thou fillest me with indignation, and I almost repent me that I have taken thee under my care. Hast thou learned nothing from this month of application? Hast thou not in the first place forgotten infinitely of nonsense which was working in thy brain before? Laurence, to forget is to learn something that many never know. Hast thou not moreover learned to study Hebrew? Is that indeed a small lesson? Thank me at least for that."

"I am not disposed to trifle with holy things, Berto," I remarked in that tone of concentrated irritation which a man especially reserves for a quarrel with his best friend. "These mystic letters are grown dear to me. In the depths of this ancient language, my soul has found new springs of life. I worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I feel myself the child of Adam and Eve, the subject of David, the pupil of Solomon—"

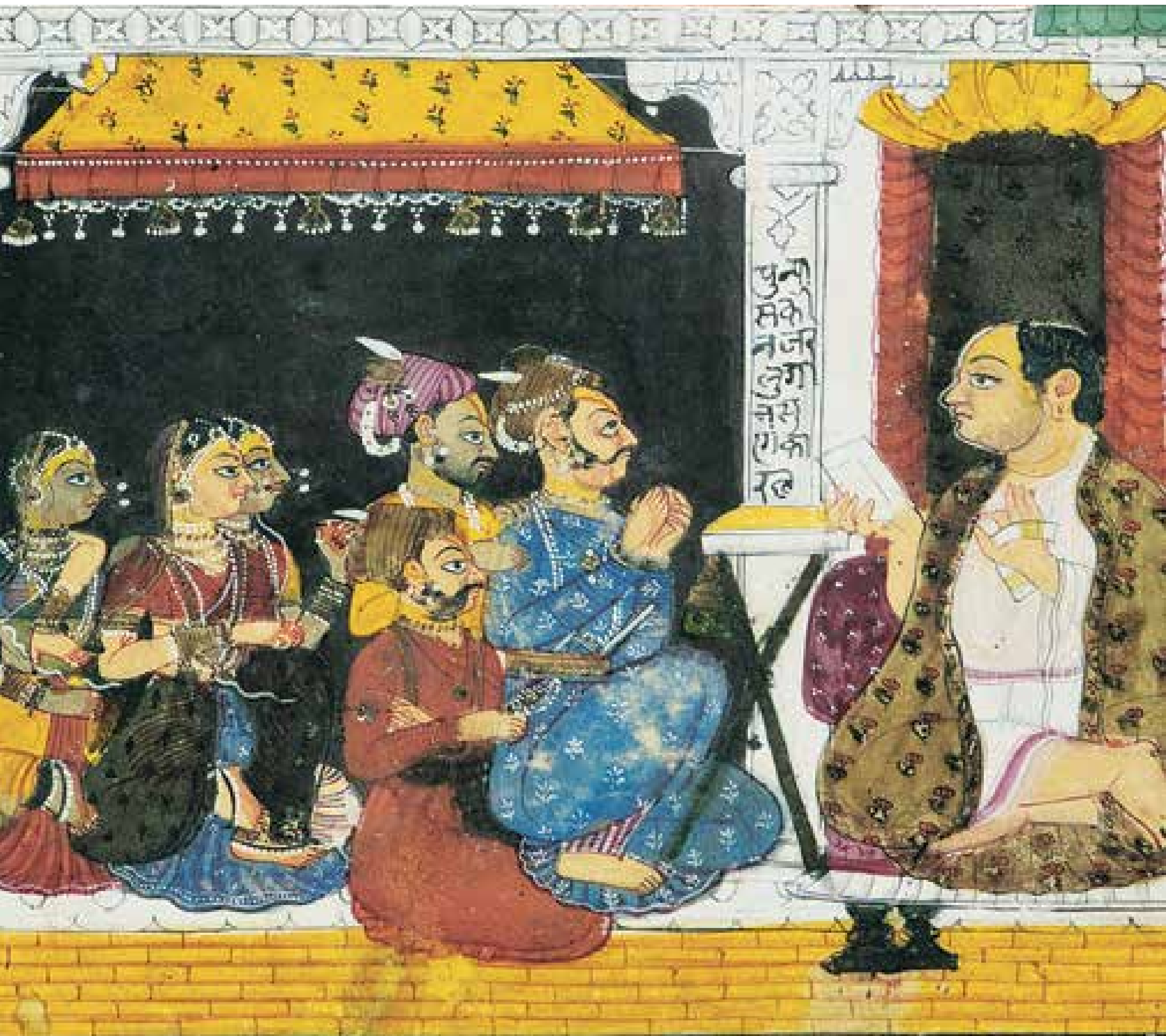
"And the brother of Cain," adroitly suggested Berto. He continued, "What you say is partially true, and entirely commonplace, but I am able notwithstanding to answer you, and a thousand like unto you.

"It is good, it is refreshing now and then to dive into the very depths of the past, but not to get oneself drowned in its waters, especially while the young, blooming future stands upon the shore, waiting to be wedded to us by the hand of destiny. The past, like the poor, we have always with us—the present, the Christ of love and of life, is with us for a time only. I am credibly informed that Hebrew is the language of the upper heaven—if so, you will soon have an opportunity of learning it not as a dead but as a living language. For the present, dear fellow pedant, let me persuade you to open your ears to the melodious Roman tongue and your eyes to the Roman world around you."

"Explain to me, Berto, your plan of study."

"Willingly, my dear friend. Know that I abhor one-sidedness, fixed ideas, and all the insanities of the learned. For them the earth should stand still, for me it turns around and shows me a new face every day. Moreover, as for the mere material of knowledge, I hold it to be of small moment—the fact is ever trivial—its grandeur and importance are simply relative. The development of the capacity in us is the only real and permanent result of our mental labors. In this view, I desire to do entire justice to every fiber of my brain, every nerve and muscle of my body, and I therefore give to each its appointed time of training and

A Jain Monk Preaching (detail), Rajasthan, c. 1680.



1919: Weimar

GUILD NEWS

The old schools of art were unable to produce unity; how could they, since art cannot be taught. They must be merged once more with the workshop. The mere drawing and painting world of the pattern designer and the applied artist must become a world that builds again. When young people who take a joy in artistic creation once more begin their life's work by learning a trade, then the unproductive "artist" will no longer be condemned to deficient artistry, for their skill will now be preserved for the crafts, in which they will be able to achieve excellence.

Architects, sculptors, painters, we all must return to the crafts! For art is not a "profession." There is no essential difference between the artist and the craftsman. The artist is an exalted craftsman. In rare moments of inspiration, transcending the consciousness of his will, the grace of heaven may cause his work to blossom into art. But proficiency in a craft is essential to every artist. Therein lies the prime source of creative imagination. Let us then create a new guild of craftsmen without the class distinctions that raise an arrogant barrier between craftsman and artist! Together let us desire, conceive, and create the new structure of the future, which will embrace architecture and sculpture and painting in one unity, and which will one day rise toward heaven from the hands of a million workers like the crystal symbol of a new faith.

Walter Gropius, *from "Manifesto of the Staatliches Bauhaus." Gropius set up his Berlin architecture firm in 1910, when he was twenty-seven. In 1919, hired by the city of Weimar to reorganize the Grand Ducal Saxon institutions of art and design education, he began to develop the Bauhaus approach, which his biographer described as "Gropius' attempt at a reversal" of the "horrifying carnage of the First World War, in which technological advances had been harnessed to the weaponry of destruction."*

exercise. I would be wise rather than erudite, can think upon most subjects, wish to profess none. I have therefore marked out twelve studies for the twelve months of the year, twelve apostles for the gospel of my life. I devote annually a month to the study of ancient languages, one to that of the modern, theology has its appointed month, so have mathematics, so political economy, antiquities, men and manners. Since I have completed this arrangement of my time, men have invented a new physiological psychology, phrenologismus by name, and this has grieved and puzzled me not a little, as my number was already full, and I cannot possibly make a year with thirteen months."

"What is to be our occupation for the next month?" I asked.

"The consideration of existing civil and social relations and institutions. As the time of carnival is approaching, we may prolong our investigations somewhat beyond the lunar limits assigned to them. The month following shall find us naturalists—the greater the change of occupation, the greater the relief, *capisci*?"

Our conversation prolonged itself far beyond the usual duration of studious or convivial tête-à-têtes. The theme was congenial to us, and the Lachryma Christi was not otherwise. Finding the room at last rather narrow for minds of so expansive a character, we walked out into the streets of Rome, which in the rapidly waning moonlight were growing as dark and treacherous as a Jesuit's countenance when the cold, keen smile is passing away from it.

Julia Ward Howe, *from* The Hermaphrodite. *Howe was born in 1819 in New York City, where her father was a banker and her mother a poet. At twenty-four she married and moved to Watertown, Massachusetts, where her husband had established a school for the blind. In 1861 Howe met Abraham Lincoln in Washington, DC; soon after, while visiting a Union Army camp, she wrote "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." Howe went on to help found the New England Woman Suffrage Association and the Association of American Women, which advocated for women's education.*

1901: Bengal

RETURN TO EARTH

I started a school in Bengal when I was nearing forty. Certainly, this was never expected of me, who had spent the greater portion of my life in writing, chiefly verses. Therefore people naturally thought that as a school it might not be one of the best of its kind, but it was sure to be something outrageously new, being the product of daring inexperience.

I know what it was to which this school owes its origin. It was not any new theory of education but the memory of my schooldays. That those days were unhappy ones for me I cannot altogether ascribe to my peculiar temperament or to any special demerit of the schools to which I was sent. It may be that if I had been a little less sensitive, I could gradually have accommodated myself to the pressure and survived long enough to earn my university degrees. But all the same, schools are schools, though some are better and some worse, according to their own standard.

> *But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*
>
> —*Genesis, c. 900* BC

The young mind should be saturated with the idea that it has been born in a human world which is in harmony with the world around it. And this is what our regular type of school ignores with an air of superior wisdom, severe and disdainful. It forcibly snatches away children from a world full of the mystery of God's own handiwork, full of the suggestiveness of personality. It is a mere method of discipline which refuses to take into account the individual. It is a manufactory specially designed for grinding out uniform results. It follows an imaginary straight line of the average in digging its channel of education. But life's line is not the straight line, for it is fond of playing the seesaw with the line of the average, bringing upon its head the rebuke of the school. For according to the school, life is perfect when it allows itself to be treated as dead, to be cut into symmetrical conveniences. And this was the cause of my suffering when I was sent to school. For all of a sudden, I found my world vanishing from around me, giving place to wooden benches and straight walls staring at me with the blank stare of the blind. I was not a creation of the schoolmaster—the government board of education was not consulted when I took birth in the world. But was that any reason why they should wreak their vengeance upon me for this oversight of my creator?

But the legend is that eating of the fruit of knowledge is not consonant with dwelling in paradise. Therefore men's children have to be banished from their paradise into a realm of death, dominated by the decency of a tailoring department. So my mind had to accept the tight-fitting encasement of the school, which, being like the shoes of a mandarin woman, pinched and bruised my nature on all sides and at every movement. I was fortunate enough in extricating myself before insensibility set in.

Though I did not have to serve the full penal term which men of my position have to undergo to find their entrance into cultured society, I am glad that I did not altogether escape from its molestation. For it has given me knowledge of the wrong from which the children of men suffer.

The cause of it is this, that man's intention is going against God's intention as to how children should grow into knowledge. How we should conduct our business is our own affair, and therefore in our offices we are free to create in the measure of our special purposes. But such office arrangement does not suit God's creation. And children are God's own creation.

We have come to this world to accept it, not merely to know it. We may become powerful by knowledge, but we attain fullness by sympathy. The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence. But we find that this education of sympathy is not only systemati-

Disciplinary Action

Classroom punishments then and now

What	Then	Now
Dunce Cap 	Thirteenth-century theologian John Duns Scotus first conceived of the pointed cap as "a reverse funnel for knowledge," and the hat remained a symbol of intelligence until the 1500s, when Protestant humanists began to mock Duns' intellectual heirs.	As late as the 1950s teachers sent disruptive or slow-learning students into the corner of the classroom to wear a dunce cap and incur the derision of their peers. In 2021 a Maine lawyer challenged a local Covid-19 mask mandate by comparing the requirement to making him wear a dunce cap. The court dismissed his suit.
Device Confiscation 	Pagers were banned from many classrooms around the United States in the late 1980s, both for their disruptive beeping and for their alleged connections to illicit drug commerce. "It is a dangerous thing to start banning objects that are merely associated with criminals," one Brooklyn high schooler told a journalist in 1988. "What comes next—the banning of certain types of clothing or hairstyles?"	In 2014 an Aquinas College professor's policy of requiring students whose phones rang during class to answer on speakerphone backfired when a student's friend called her pretending to be a pregnancy-resource-center counselor. The event was secretly filmed on a cell phone and today has more than 69 million views on YouTube.
Paddling 	An instrument of punishment on antebellum American plantations, flat wooden paddles later became a common disciplinary tool in classrooms. In 1977 a Florida student sued his principal after a paddling "so severe that he suffered a hematoma." The case reached the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled that the Eighth Amendment applied only to prisoners.	Paddling is still permitted in nineteen states; in Mississippi, 85 percent of school districts allow it. "Our number one goal is to educate students, and part of that is having an orderly, disciplined classroom," a state administrator told a journalist in 2019. "If a family decides they want to opt out of corporal punishment as a discipline option, they can absolutely do that."
Writing Lines 	"Writing lines is the penance," one author wrote in 1887, that English schoolboys "do for all their sins, in and out of school." Since the first episode of *The Simpsons* aired in 1989, Bart has written more than ten thousand lines on a Springfield Elementary School chalkboard.	In 2016 a professor in Chengdu gained media attention for his updated version of the practice: rather than being told to write the same sentence hundreds of times, students who arrive late to his class are forced to write out a list of one thousand emoji.
Rattan Cane 	The rattan cane was so feared by students in one Montreal classroom that in 1882 they began using a rubber shield "in localities where the vengeance of the pedagogue is prone to fall." In response, the teacher invented an alternative punishment heralded as "genius" in the *New York Times*: a "mustard plaster well sprinkled with red pepper" that burned when applied to the skin.	Rattan canes continue to be used in classrooms in countries where corporal punishment is permitted, such as Nigeria, where an Igbo adage holds that "the body listens better than the ear." In the Igbo language the word for teacher, *onye nkuzi*, is a combination of the word *onye* (person), *nku* (stick), and *zi* (to direct).

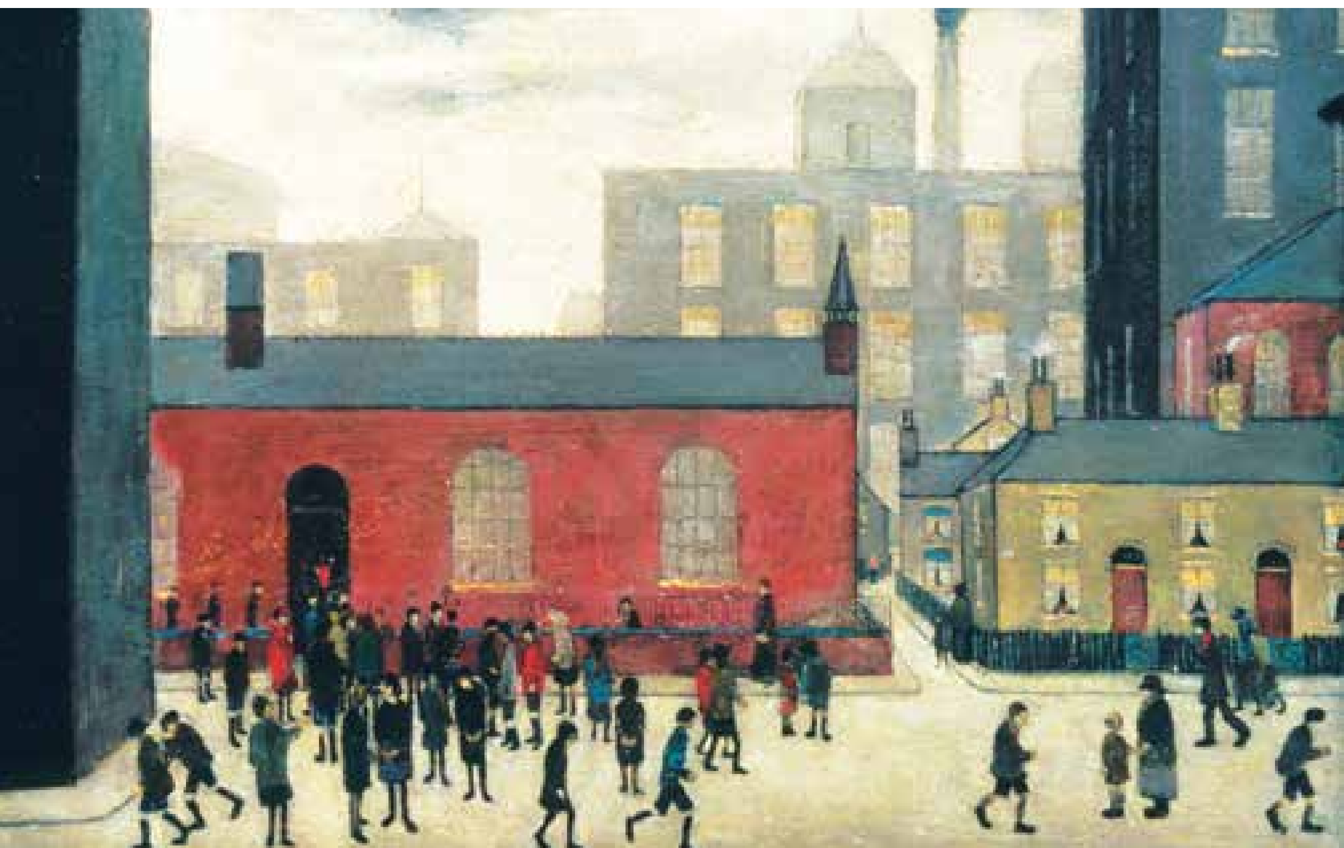
cally ignored in schools but is severely repressed. From our very childhood, habits are formed and knowledge is imparted in such a manner that our life is weaned away from nature and our mind and the world are set in opposition from the beginning of our days. Thus the greatest of educations for which we came prepared is neglected, and we are made to lose our world to find a bagful of information instead. We rob the child of his earth to teach him geography, of language to teach him grammar. His hunger is for the epic, but he is supplied with chronicles of facts and dates. He was born in the human world but is banished into the world of living gramophones, to expiate for the original sin of being born in ignorance. Child nature protests against such calamity with all its power of suffering, subdued at last into silence by punishment.

Our childhood is the period when we have or ought to have more freedom—freedom from the necessity of specialization into the narrow bounds of social and professional conventionalism. I well remember the surprise and annoyance of an experienced headmaster, reputed to be a successful disciplinarian, when he saw one of the boys of my school climbing a tree and choosing a fork of the branches for settling down to his studies. I had to say to him in explanation that "childhood is the only period of life when a civilized man can exercise his choice between the branches of a tree and his drawing-room chair, and should I deprive this boy of that privilege because I, as a grown-up man, am barred from it?" What is surprising is to notice the same headmaster's approbation of the boys' studying botany. He believes in an impersonal knowledge of the tree because that is science, but not in a personal experience of it.

This growth of experience leads to forming instinct, which is the result of nature's own method of instruction. The boys of my school have acquired instinctive knowledge of the physiognomy of the tree. By the least touch, they know where they can find a foothold upon an apparently inhospitable trunk; they know how far they can take liberty with the branches, how to distribute their bodies' weight so as to make themselves least burdensome to branchlets. I myself was brought up in a cultured home in a town, and as far as my personal behavior goes, I have been obliged to act all through my life as if I were born in a world where there are no trees. Therefore I consider it as a part of education for my boys to let them fully realize that they are in a scheme of existence where trees are a substantial fact, not merely as generating chlorophyll and taking carbon from the air but as living trees.

Rabindranath Tagore, *from "My School." In 1916 the Bengali poet and philosopher embarked on a speaking tour in Japan and the United States, during which he delivered this lecture. Three years earlier he had become the first non-European to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. When Tagore received the news, his biographer E.J. Thompson was visiting his school in Santiniketan. "The boys went mad," Thompson wrote. "They didn't know what the Nobel Prize was, but they understood that the* gurudeb *they adored had done something wonderful, as indeed he was always doing."*

Coming Out of School, by L.S. Lowry, 1927.



c. 1200: Castle Sauvage

TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

The day for the ceremony drew near, the invitations to King Pellinore and Sir Grummore were sent out, and the Wart withdrew himself more and more into the kitchen.

"Come along, Wart, old boy," said Sir Ector ruefully. "I didn't think you would take it so bad. It doesn't become you to do this sulkin'."

"I am not sulking," said the Wart. "I don't mind a bit, and I am very glad that Kay is going to be a knight. Please don't think I am sulking."

"You are a good boy," said Sir Ector. "I know you're not sulkin' really, but do cheer up. Kay isn't such a bad stick, you know, in his way."

"Kay is a splendid chap," said the Wart. "Only I was not happy because he did not want to go hawking or anything, with me, anymore."

"It is his youthfulness," said Sir Ector. "It will all clear up."

"I am sure it will," said the Wart. "It is only that he does not want me to go with him, just at the moment. And so, of course, I don't go. But I will go," added the Wart. "As soon as he commands me, I will do exactly what he says. Honestly, I think Kay is a good person, and I was not sulking a bit."

"You have a glass of this canary," said Sir Ector, "and go and see if old Merlyn can't cheer you up."

"Sir Ector has given me a glass of canary," said the Wart, "and sent me to see if you can't cheer me up."

"Sir Ector," said Merlyn, "is a wise man."

"Well," said the Wart, "what about it?"

"The best thing for being sad," replied Merlyn, beginning to puff and blow, "is to learn something. That is the only thing that never fails. You may grow old and trembling in your anatomies, you may lie awake at night listening to the disorder of your veins, you may miss your only love, you may see the world about you devastated by evil lunatics, or know your honor trampled in the sewers of baser minds. There is only one thing for it, then—to learn. Learn why the world wags and what wags it. That is the only thing which the mind can never exhaust, never alienate, never be tortured by, never fear or distrust, and never dream of regretting. Learning is the thing for you. Look at what a lot of things there are to learn—pure science, the only purity there is. You can learn astronomy in a lifetime, natural history in three, literature in six. And then, after you have exhausted a milliard lifetimes in biology and medicine and theocriticism and geography and history and economics—why, you can start to make a cartwheel out of the appropriate wood, or spend fifty years learning to begin to learn to beat your adversary at fencing. After that you can start again on mathematics, until it is time to learn to plow."

> *There is fire in the flint and steel, but it is friction that causes it to flash, flame, and burn, and give light where all else may be darkness. There is music in the violin, but the touch of the master is needed to fill the air and the soul with the concord of sweet sounds. There is power in the human mind, but education is needed for its development.*
>
> *—Frederick Douglass, 1894*

"Apart from all these things," said the Wart, "what do you suggest for me just now?"

"Let me see," said the magician, considering. "We have had a short six years of this, and in that time I think I am right in saying that you have been many kinds of animal, vegetable, mineral, etc.—many things in earth, air, fire, and water?"

"I don't know much," said the Wart, "about the animals and earth."

"Then you had better meet my friend the badger."

"I have never met a badger."

"Good," said Merlyn. "Except for Archimedes, he is the most learned creature I know. You will like him."

"By the way," added the magician, stopping in the middle of his spell, "there is one thing I



Old Pike School near Somerset, Ohio, 1941. Photograph by Edward Weston.

ought to tell you. This is the last time I shall be able to turn you into anything. All the magic for that sort of thing has been used up, and this will be the end of your education. When Kay has been knighted, my labors will be over. You will have to go away then, to be his squire in the wide world, and I shall go elsewhere. Do you think you have learned anything?"

"I have learned, and been happy."

"That's right, then," said Merlyn. "Try to remember what you learned."

He proceeded with the spell, pointed his wand of lignum vitae at the Little Bear, which had just begun to glow in the dimness as it hung by its tail from the North Star, and called out cheerfully, "Have a good time for the last visit. Give my love to Badger."

T.H. White, *from* The Once and Future King. *Born in Bombay in 1906, White studied at Cambridge and taught English until the age of thirty, when he became a recluse and devoted himself to falconry, aviation, and medieval literature. Two years later he published* The Sword in the Stone, *the first of four novels inspired by Thomas Malory's fifteenth-century* Le Morte Darthur. *In 1958 White republished his Arthurian quartet in the omnibus volume* The Once and Future King. *"I have been arming myself against disaster," he said during a U.S. lecture tour for the book. "That is why I learn."*

c. 1950: Pawarenga

HOMESCHOOLED

My grandmother's teaching was very, very old, very *tapu*, very Maorified. Whatever she did, she would *karakia* [pray]: you could hear her mumbling, doing her thing. She tells a story every night about the old days; every night she talks about our history, our *tupunas* [ancestors], teaches us a lot of things, like *marae* protocol, how you should do this, why you should do that. It's a different way of bringing up from Mum and Dad.

She used to tell us a lot about the weather. She would sit on her veranda looking out to the harbor, and she would say, "Could you see the change in the land?" We just would say, "Yes." It is a beautiful day, and she would say, "Do your washing today, because it is going to rain tomorrow." And it rained—she would never miss a beat. Right up to this day, I can look at the same hills, I couldn't see the difference. She would try to teach us, but we weren't interested. We would go to the coast for *kaimoana* [seafood], and everything was lovely. She would say, "That's enough, come back." We say, "No, we get some more." "No," she would say. "No, come back, that's enough." In about an hour after you leave that rock, you see the place is pounding.

As I'm getting older, I'm starting to see what my grandmother sees, the different coloring in the paddocks and the ranges and the swirling of the clouds. She pointed it out. She used to go out when it's cloudy, and especially at dusk, when it's about to get dark, you see a cloud swirling; and when a cloud swirls, she used to point up. The clouds used to turn, whipping it out, out toward the ocean, and she reckons in our place it's good for diving, because the wind is keeping the shores really clear, because it's taking everything out to sea. If the cloud's coming around from the back hills, coming in this way, it's bringing everything in, the dirt right in to shore.

In 1951 we shifted from Pawarenga to Broadwood. It was the first time we had lived in an outside area, an area that felt to us at the time as predominantly European. There weren't many Maori families in Broadwood. We went to a high school, and the teachings were very different, different in a way, that is, to me. Looking at a teacher talking, it made no sense to me. The school we went to in Pawarenga was a convent. The nuns talked, but the majority of stuff we did over there, the teachings that they went through, was a practical way of teaching. They showed us how to do things. If we didn't know how to write a name, they came up and made our hands go the way which the pencil should go to form whatever letter or word we wanted to write. That was the only way we were taught. And to go into a public school, that was different. I felt that these people were just standing there talking to us and writing on the blackboard, and they never came down and showed us what to do. It was a different world of teaching. I struggled, I struggled right to the day I left school. I was used to the practical way of teaching where I was shown what to do and once they had shown me a thing to do, I'll never forget it. Teachers came home to see Mum and Dad to see if they could take me to a special school where I could pick up a lot, but Dad knew I couldn't because of the way they taught me. But our home life, the way we were taught at home, it still existed at that time. I shifted from there, I went to Whangarei Boys' High School, and there my life really changed. It was the last stage in my schooling. That was when I found out education was really something important. It was too late, I was finishing school.

> *The mind that is not baffled is not employed.*
> *—Wendell Berry, 1983*

Nikora Atama, *from an interview by Joan Metge for* Tauira: Maori Methods of Learning and Teaching. *At the age of ten, Metge moved from Auckland to Pukekohe, a town with a growing population of Maori migrant workers and, later, the site of Metge's anthropological fieldwork. For this 2015 book, Metge interviewed Maori adults about their educations. When teaching children, Metge wrote, Maori adults deliberately dropped "snippets of information which made no sense at the time," a tactic meant "to stimulate curiosity, inquiry, and a search for meaning."*



A Difficult Question, by Ignaz Marcel Gaugengigl, 1883.

1645: Kumamoto

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

The mind of transmission of direct communication—that is what I will transmit to he who has received the true way of my School of Two Swords. It is essential to train well, so that your body becomes strategy. The rest will be communicated orally.

I have written above in this scroll the general teaching of my school of the sword.

In strategy, to know how to win with the sword, it is necessary first to learn the five forms of striking in conjunction with the five guard positions. Mastering by this means the pathway of the sword, the body will be free, and the mind will come alive to grasp the cadences of the way. Your sword and your technique will be naturally remarkable, since your body will be available from head to toe to move with free mastery. It is in this way that you will be victorious first over one, then over two, and that you will finally be able to understand what is good and what is bad in strategy. Train by following one by one the instructions I have written down in this text, and you will progressively obtain the principle of the way by practicing combat with different opponents. Never fail to have this attitude of mind, go forward without hurry, learn the essence of things through frequent experiences, taking advantage of every occasion. Fight against all kinds of people, and be aware of their minds. Follow a road that is a thousand leagues long one step at a time. Be without haste and be convinced that all these practices are the duty of a *bushi*. Be victorious today over what you were yesterday; tomorrow be victorious over your clumsiness and then also over your skill. Practice in accordance with what I have written without letting your mind deviate from the way.

Even if you gain victory over the most formidable of adversaries, unless it is in conformity with the principle, this victory cannot be considered part of the true way. By assimilating this principle, you will become able to conquer several tens of adversaries. Then through the wisdom of the art of the sword, you will be able to master individual strategy and group strategy.

A thousand days of training to develop, ten thousand days of training to polish. You must examine all this well.

Miyamoto Musashi, *from* The Book of Five Rings. *Born in 1584, Musashi was thirteen when he fought and won his first duel. "I was unbeaten by the enemy because I gave no thought to my life," he recalled. "I simply walked in and struck." Though he is said to have fought in dozens of individual sword fights and won all of them, he never served under a daimyo, associated himself with any training academy, or established a permanent residence. "He was outstandingly talented and highly cultured," writes his biographer, "but there was something rough and eccentric at the core."*

c. 1191: Fustat

PRIMARY SOURCE

There are those who set their thought to work after having attained perfection in the divine science, turn wholly toward God, may He be cherished and held sublime, renounce what is other than Him, and direct all the acts of their intellect toward an examination of the beings with a view to drawing from them proof with regard to Him, so as to know His governance of them in whatever way it is possible. This is the rank of the prophets. Among them there is he who because of the greatness of his apprehension and his renouncing everything that is other than God, may He be exalted, has attained such a degree that it is said of him, "And he was there with the Lord," putting questions and receiving answers, speaking and being spoken to, in that holy place. And because of his great joy in that which he apprehended, he did neither eat bread nor drink water. For his intellect attained such strength that all the gross faculties in the body ceased to function. I refer to the various kinds of the sense of touch. Some prophets could only see, some of them from close by and some from afar, as a prophet says, "From afar the Lord appeared unto me." Let us now return to our subject, which is to confirm men in the intention to set their thought to work on God alone after they have achieved knowledge of Him. This is the worship peculiar to those who have apprehended the true realities; the more they think of Him and of being with Him, the more their worship increases.

As for someone who thinks and frequently mentions God, without knowledge, following a mere imagining or following a belief adopted because of his reliance on the authority of somebody else, he is to my mind outside the habitation and far away from it and does not in true reality mention or think about God. For that thing which is in his imagination and which he mentions in his speech does not correspond to any being at all and has merely been invented by his imagination. This kind of worship ought to be engaged in only after intellectual conception has been achieved. If, however, you have apprehended God and His acts in accordance with what is required by the intellect, you should afterward engage in totally devoting yourself to Him, endeavor to come closer to Him, and strengthen the bond between you and Him—that is, the intellect. Thus it says, "Unto thee it was shown, that thou mightest know that the Lord, and so on"; and it says, "Know this day and lay it to thy heart, and so on"; and it says, "Know ye that the Lord He is God." The Torah has made it clear that this last worship can be engaged in only after apprehension has been achieved; it says, "To love the Lord your God, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul." Now we have made it clear several times that love is proportionate to apprehension. After love comes this worship to which attention has also been drawn by the sages, may their memory be blessed, who said, "This is the worship in the heart." In my opinion, it consists in setting thought to work on the first intelligible and in devoting oneself exclusively to this as far as this is within one's capacity. Therefore you will find that David exhorted Solomon and fortified him in these two things, I mean his endeavor to apprehend Him and his endeavor to worship Him after apprehension has been achieved. He said, "And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father and serve Him, and so on. If thou seek Him, He will be found of thee, and so on." The exhortation always refers to intellectual apprehensions, not to imagination; for thought concerning imaginings is not called knowledge but "that which cometh into your mind." Thus it is clear that after apprehension, total devotion to Him and the employment of intellectual thought in constantly loving Him should

> *A whale-ship was my Yale College and my Harvard.*
>
> *—Herman Melville, 1851*

be aimed at. Mostly this is achieved in solitude and isolation. Hence every excellent man stays frequently in solitude and does not meet anyone unless it is necessary.

A call to attention. We have already made it clear to you that that intellect which overflowed from Him, may He be exalted, toward us is the bond between us and Him. You have the choice: if you wish to strengthen and to fortify this bond, you can do so; if, however, you wish gradually to make it weaker and feebler until you cut it, you can also do that. You can strengthen this bond only by employing it in loving Him and in progressing toward this, just as we have explained. And it is made weaker and feebler if you busy your thought with what is other than Him. Know that even if you were the man who knew most the true reality of the divine science, you

1968: Berkeley, CA

RADICAL REFORM

The college and university campuses of America are a long way from where most of us come. Our homeland (known to white folks as the ghetto) is hardly conducive to the growing of ivy. "Mother wits" was our thing, not encyclopedias. We have been the companions of every evil, cycle, syndrome, or mania that would strike fear in the hearts of our white compatriots.

Education in America, as we have come to know it, is a strictly utilitarian endeavor. The colleges and universities have not been established for the sake of education. The colleges and universities are the wholesale producers of a designated mentality conducive to the perpetuation and continuation of America's present national life. A national life that we have witnessed to be in total and complete contradiction to the wholesome development and survival of our people.

The black student in America has, for as long as anyone can remember, been the victim of mental brutality, character subversion, and inundatory alienation from his black community. His value to his community at the end of his college or university career has been zero. His community has thereby been left without the element most essential to its regeneration and construction—its aware young people. Black students can no longer afford to be educated away from their origins. Henceforth, our education must speak to the needs of our community and our people. We can no longer prostitute our minds to the vain and irrelevant intellectual pursuits of Western society while our community lies in ruin and our people are threatened with concentration camps. This would amount to intellectual shuffling, and we are determined to shuffle no more.

We must therefore ask with unrelenting insistence that our future education be radically reformed. We demand a program of "Black Studies," a program that will be of, by, and for black people. We demand that we be educated realistically, and that no form of education which attempts to lie to us or otherwise miseducate us will be accepted.

If the university is not prepared to educate us in such a way that our education may be relative to our lives, then we ask that the university prepare itself to do so immediately. If the university will not prepare itself to address our educational needs, then we ask that the university accept no more of our parents' tax money, which it has used in the past to miseducate us.

We have outlined a proposed course of study that we believe necessary not only for our education but for our very survival. We ask that this proposed program be considered in the light of the stark realities of American society. We ask that this program be considered because the destruction of our minds and the current rate of attrition for our students can no longer be tolerated. We ask that this program be reconsidered because nothing less will do.

Afro-American Student Union, *from its "Proposal for Establishing a Black Studies Program." The University of California, Berkeley, inaugurated its African American studies department in 1970, two years after the union submitted this proposal, and offered thirty courses in its first semester. "Everybody knows," James Baldwin said in a 1979 speech hosted by the department, "that you can't change a school without changing a neighborhood, and you can't change a neighborhood without changing the city, and there ain't nobody prepared to change the city, because they want the city to be white."*



Students in a Department of Zoology laboratory, University of Oxford, 2016. Photograph by Martin Parr.

would cut that bond existing between you and God if you would empty your thought of God and busy yourself totally in eating the necessary or in occupying yourselves with the necessary. You would not be with Him then, nor He with you. For that relation between you and Him is actually broken off at that time. It is for this reason that excellent men begrudge the times in which they are turned away from Him by other occupations and warn against this, saying, "Do not let God be absent from your thought." And David says, "I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand, I shall not bend down"; he means to say: I do not empty my thought of Him, and it is as if He were my right hand from which, because of the rapidity of its motion, my attention is not distracted even for an instant, and therefore I do not bend down—that is, I do not fall.

Know that all the practices of the worship, such as reading the Torah, prayer, and the performance of the other commandments, have only the end of training you to occupy yourself with His commandments, may He be exalted, rather than with matters pertaining to this world; you should act as if you were occupied with Him, may He be exalted, and not with that which is other than Him. If, however, you pray merely by moving your lips while facing a wall, and at the same time think about your buying and selling; or if you read the Torah with your tongue while your heart is set upon the building of your habitation and does not consider what you read; and similarly in all cases in which you perform a commandment merely with your limbs—as if you were digging a hole in the ground or hewing wood in the forest—without reflecting either upon the meaning of that action or upon Him from whom the commandment proceeds or upon the end of the action, you should not think that you have achieved the end. Rather you will then be similar to those of whom it is said, "Thou art near in their mouth, and far from their reins."

Moses Maimonides, *from* Guide for the Perplexed. *Born around 1138 in Córdoba, Maimonides left Andalusia with his family after the invasion of the Berber confederation of Almohads in the 1170s. He settled in Egypt, where he completed his* Guide *around 1190. Maimonides' nonliteral reading of the Torah caused controversy in some rabbinic circles. "The book is sealed with many seals," Leo Strauss wrote in an introduction to the book, and "is not merely a key to a forest but is itself a forest, an enchanted forest, and hence also an enchanting forest: it is a delight to the eyes."*

1966: Pisa

SOCIAL CLASS

During my last year in Pisa, the perspective from which I had experienced the first three changed. I was possessed by an ungrateful dislike of the city, my classmates, the teachers, the exams, the frigid days, the political meetings on warm evenings near the baptistery, the films at the film forum, the entire unchanging urban space: the Timpano, the Lungarno Pacinotti, Via XXIV May, Via San Frediano, Piazza dei Cavalieri, Via Consoli del Mare, Via San Lorenzo, routes that were the same and yet alien even when the baker said hello and the newspaper seller chatted about the weather, alien in the voices that I had nevertheless forced myself to imitate from the start, alien in the color of the stone and the plants and the signs and the clouds or sky.

My first impression, that of finding myself part of a fearless battle, passed. The trepidation at every exam and the joy of passing it with the highest marks had faded. Gone was the pleasure of reeducating my voice, my gestures, my way of dressing and walking, as if I were competing for the prize of best disguise, the mask worn so well that it was *almost* a face.

Suddenly I was aware of that *almost*. Had I made it? Almost. Had I torn myself away from Naples, the neighborhood? Almost. Did I have new friends, male and female, who came from cultured backgrounds, often more cultured than the one that Professor Galiani and her children belonged to? Almost. From one exam to the next, had I become a student who was well received by the solemn professors who questioned me? Almost. Behind the *almost* I seemed to see how things stood. I was afraid. I was afraid as I had been the day I arrived in Pisa. I was scared of anyone who had that culture without the *almost*, with casual confidence.

There were many people at the Normale who did. It wasn't just students who passed the exams brilliantly, in Latin or Greek or history. They were youths—almost all male, as were the

The Ploughing Lesson, by François-André Vincent, 1798.



outstanding professors and the illustrious names who had passed through that institution—who excelled because they knew, without apparent effort, the present and future use of the labor of studying. They knew because of the families they came from or through an instinctive orientation. They knew how a newspaper or a journal was put together, how a publishing house was organized, what a radio or television office was, how a film originates, what the university hierarchies were, what there was beyond the borders of our towns or cities, beyond the Alps, beyond the sea. They knew the names of the people who counted, the people to be admired and those to be despised. I, on the other hand, knew nothing, to me anyone whose name was printed in a newspaper or a book was a god. If someone said to me with admiration or with resentment, "That's so-and-so, that's the son of so-and-so, that's that other so-and-so's granddaughter," I was silent or I pretended to know. I perceived, of course, that they were *truly* important names, and yet I had never heard them, I didn't know what they had done that was important, I didn't know the map of prestige. For example, I came to my exams very well prepared, but if the professor were suddenly to ask me, "Do you know from what works I derive the authority on the basis of which I teach this subject in this university?," I wouldn't know what to answer. But the others knew. So I moved among them fearful of saying and doing the wrong things.

When Franco Mari fell in love with me, that fear diminished. He instructed me, I learned to move in his wake. Franco was lively, attentive to others, insolent, bold. He felt so sure of having read the right books, and thus of being right, that he always spoke with authority. I had learned to express myself in private and, more rarely, in public, relying on his reputation. And I was successful, or at least was becoming so. Strengthened by his certainties, I was at times bolder than he, at times more effective. But although I had made a lot of progress, I still worried that I wasn't up to it, that I would say the wrong thing, reveal how ignorant and inexperienced I was in precisely the things that everyone knew. And as soon as Franco, in spite of himself, went out of my life, the fear regained power. I had had the proof of what, deep down, I already knew. His wealth, his upbringing, his reputation, well known among the students, as a young militant on the left, his sociability, even his courage when he delivered carefully measured speeches against powerful people within and outside the university—all this had given him an aura that automatically extended to me, as his fiancée or girlfriend or companion, as if the pure and simple fact that he loved me were the public sanctioning of my talents. But as soon as he lost his place at the Normale, his merits faded and no longer shone on me. The students from good families stopped inviting me to Sunday outings and parties. Some began making fun of my Neapolitan accent again. The things he had given me were no longer in fashion, looked dated. I had quickly understood that Franco, his presence in my life, had masked my true condition but hadn't changed it, I hadn't really succeeded in fitting in. I was one of those who labored day and night, got excellent results, were even treated with congeniality and respect, but would never carry off with the proper manner the high level of those studies. I would always be afraid: afraid of saying the wrong things, of using an exaggerated tone, of dressing unsuitably, of revealing petty feelings, of not having interesting thoughts.

> *The truth is, very few can be trusted with an education.*
>
> *—Louise Imogen Guiney, 1897*

Elena Ferrante, *from* The Story of a New Name. *The identity of the pseudonymous Ferrante, who has published eleven books since 1992, remains unconfirmed despite several popular theories. The first of her four Neapolitan novels, which follow the lives of Lenù and Lila, a pair of friends who grow up together in a Naples slum, appeared in 2011. Rather than "a mere tool of emancipation," Ferrante said in a 2016 interview, education is also "the manifestation of a permanent anxiety about intelligence, a necessity imposed by the relentlessly chaotic circumstances of life, a tool of daily struggle."*

806: Dazaifu

DATA TRANSFER

During the sixth month of Enryaku 23 [804], I, Kukai, sailed for China aboard Ship One in the party of Lord Fujiwara, envoy to the Tang court. By the eighth month, we reached the coast of Fukien and by the end of the twelfth month arrived at Changan, where we lodged at the official guest residence. The envoy and his retinue started home for Japan on the eleventh day of the third month, Enryaku 24 [805], but in obedience to an imperial edict, I alone remained behind in the Ximing Temple, where our Eichu formerly resided.

> *Headmasters have powers at their disposal with which prime ministers have never yet been invested.*
>
> *—Winston Churchill, 1930*

One day, while calling on the eminent Buddhist teachers of the capital, I happened to meet the abbot of the East Pagoda Hall of the Qinglong Temple, whose Buddhist name was the Acharya Huiguo. This great priest was the disciple chosen to transmit the dharma from the Tripitaka Master of Broad Wisdom of the Daxingshan Temple. His virtue aroused the reverence of his age; his teachings were lofty enough to guide emperors. Three sovereigns who revered him were initiated by receiving *abhiseka* [lit., "sprinkling"]. The four classes of believers looked up to him for instruction in the Esoteric Buddhist teachings.

I called on the abbot in the company of five or six monks from the Ximing Temple. As soon as he saw me, he smiled with pleasure and joyfully said, "I knew that you would come! I have waited for such a long time. What pleasure it gives me to look upon you today at last! My life is drawing to an end, and until you came there was no one to whom I could transmit the teachings. Go without delay to the altar of *abhiseka* with incense and a flower." I returned to the temple where I had been staying and got the things that were necessary for the ceremony. It was early in the sixth month, then, that I entered the altar of *abhiseka* for primary initiation. I stood before the matrix mandala and cast my flower in the prescribed manner. By chance it fell on the body of Mahavairocana Tathagata in the center. The master exclaimed in delight, "How amazing! How perfectly amazing!" He repeated this three or four times in joy and wonder. I was then given the fivefold *abhiseka* and received instruction in the grace of the Three Mysteries. Next I was taught the Sanskrit formulas and ritual manuals for the matrix realm and learned the yogic practices that use various sacred objects of concentration to gain transcendental insight.

Early in the seventh month, I stood before the diamond mandala, and I was given once more the fivefold *abhiseka*. When I cast my flower, it again fell on Mahavairocana, and the abbot marveled as he had before. Also, early in the following month, I received the *abhiseka* for the ordination into the mastership of the transmission of the dharma. On this day I provided a feast for five hundred monks and made wide offerings to the four classes of believers. The dignitaries of the Qinglong Temple, Daxingshan Temple, and others all attended the feast, and everyone was delighted for my sake.

Then I received instruction in the mantras and mudras of the five divisions of the Vajrasekhara Sutra and spent some time learning Sanskrit and the Sanskrit hymns. The abbot informed me that the Esoteric Buddhist scriptures are so abstruse that their meaning cannot be conveyed except through art. For this reason he ordered the court artist Li Zhen and about a dozen other painters to execute ten scrolls of the matrix and diamond mandalas and assembled more than twenty scribes to make copies of the Vajrasekhara Sutra and other important Esoteric Buddhist scriptures. He also ordered the bronzesmith Zhao Wu to cast fifteen ritual implements. These orders for the painting of religious images and the copying of the sutras were issued at various times.



University of Oxford, 2018. Photograph by Steve Raymer.

One day the abbot told me, "Long ago, when I was still young, I met the great Tripitaka Master. From the first moment he saw me, he treated me like his son, and on his visit to the court and his return to the temple, I was as inseparable from him as his shadow. He confided to me, 'You will be the receptacle of the Esoteric Buddhist teachings. Do your best! Do your best!' I was then initiated into the teachings of both the matrix and the diamond and into the secret mudras as well. The rest of his disciples, monks and laity alike, studied just one of the two great teachings [diamond and matrix] or a yogic practice on one sacred object of concentration with the use of one mudra, but not all of them, as I did. How deeply I am indebted to him, I shall never be able to express.

"Now my existence on earth approaches its term, and I cannot long remain. I urge you, therefore, to take the mandalas of both realms and the hundred volumes of the teachings of the diamond vehicle, together with the ritual implements and these objects that were left to me by my master. Return to your country and propagate the teachings there.

"When you first arrived, I feared I did not have enough time left to teach you everything, but now I have completed teaching you, and the work of copying the sutras and making the images has also been finished. Hasten back to your country, offer these things to the court, and spread the teachings throughout your country to increase the happiness of the people. Then the land will know peace, and people everywhere will be content. In that way you will return, thanks to the Buddha and to your teacher. That is also the way to show your devotion to your country and to your family. My disciple Yiming will carry on the teachings here. Your task is to transmit them to the Eastern Land. Do your best! Do your best!"

These were his final instructions to me, kind and patient as always. On the night of the full moon, in the twelfth month of the past year, he purified himself in a ritual bath, and lying on his right side and making the mudra of Mahavairocana, he breathed his last.

That night, while I sat in meditation in the hall, the abbot appeared to me in his usual form and said, "You and I have long been pledged to propagate the Esoteric Buddhist teachings. If I am reborn in Japan, this time I shall be your disciple."

Kukai, *from* Catalogue of Imported Items. *Born into an exiled aristocratic family in Shikoku, Kukai was educated by his uncle, a Confucian scholar. In his early twenties, he wrote his first treatise, a fictional discussion between three men, each representing a branch of philosophy. In 804 he traveled to China to study Shingon Buddhism and related subjects, and upon his return to Japan in 806 he wrote this book about what he had learned. "He absorbed all my instructions in his mind," the Shingon master Hui-kuo later recalled of Kukai, "just like pouring water from one vase into another."*



Scholars in the House of Wisdom (detail), Baghdad, fourteenth century.

1904: Chicago

MANUAL LABOR

A word on the relations of the public school teachers and the public schools to the labor unions. As the professional organization furnishes the motive and ideal which shall determine the character and methods of the organized effort of teachers to secure better conditions for teaching, so is it the province of the educational agencies in a democracy to furnish the motive and ideal which shall determine the character and methods of the organization of its members for self-protection.

There is no possible conflict between the good of society and the good of its members, of which the industrial workers are the vast majority. The organization of these workers for mutual aid has shortened the hours of labor, raised and equalized the wages of men and women, and taken the children from the factories and workshops. These humanitarian achievements of the labor unions—and many others which space forbids enumerating—in raising the standard of living of the poorest and weakest members of society are a service to society which for its own welfare it must recognize. More than this, by intelligent comprehension of the limitations of the labor unions and the causes of these limitations, by just, judicious, and helpful criticism and cooperation, society must aid them to feel the inspiration of higher ideals and to find the better means to realize these ideals.

If there is one institution on which the responsibility to perform this service rests most heavily, it is the public school. If there is one body of public servants of whom the public has a right to expect the mental and moral equipment to face the labor question and other issues vitally affecting the welfare of society and urgently pressing for a rational and scientific solution, it is the public school teachers, whose special contribution to society is their own power to think, the moral courage to follow their convictions, and the training of citizens to think and to express thought in free and intelligent action.

The narrow conception of education which makes the mechanics of reading, writing, and arithmetic and other subjects the end and aim of the schools, instead of a means to an end—which mistakes the accidental and incidental for the essential—produces the unthinking, mechanical mind in teacher and pupil and prevents the public school as an institution and the public school teachers as a body from becoming conscious of their relation to society and its problems, and from meeting their responsibili-

ties. On the other hand, that teaching which is most scientific and rational gives the highest degree of power to think and to select the most intelligent means of expressing thought in every field of activity.

The ideals and methods of the labor unions are in a measure a test of the efficiency of the schools and the other educational agencies.

How shall the public school and the industrial workers, in their struggle to secure the rights of humanity through a more just and equitable distribution of the products of their labor, meet their mutual responsibility to one another and to society?

Whether the work of coordinating these two great educational agencies, manual and mental labor, with each other and with the social organism shall be accomplished through the affiliation of the organizations of brain and manual workers is a mere matter of detail and method to be decided by the exigencies in each case. The essential thing is that the public school teachers recognize the fact that their struggle to maintain the efficiency of the schools through better conditions for themselves is a part of the same great struggle which the manual workers—often misunderstood and unaided—have been making for humanity through their efforts to secure living conditions for themselves and their children; and that back of the unfavorable conditions of both is a common cause.

Two ideals are struggling for supremacy in American life today: one, the industrial ideal dominating through the supremacy of commercialism, which subordinates the worker to the product and the machine; the other, the ideal of democracy, the ideal of the educators, which places humanity above all machines, and demands that all activity shall be the expression of life. If this ideal of the educators cannot be carried over into the industrial field, then the ideal of industrialism will be carried over into the school. Those two ideals can no more continue to exist in American life than our nation could have continued half-slave and half-free. If the school cannot bring joy to the work of the world, the joy must go out of its own life, and work in the school, as in the industrial field, will become drudgery.

Viewed in this light, the duty and responsibility of the educators in the solution to the industrial question is one which must thrill and fascinate while it awes, for the very depth of the significance of life is shut up in this question. But the first requisite is to put aside all prejudice, all preconceived notions, all misinformation and half information, and to take to this question what the educators have long recognized must be taken to scientific investigation in other fields. There may have been justification for failure to do this in the past, but we cannot face the responsibility of continued failure and maintain our title as thinkers and educators. When men organize and go out to kill, they go surrounded by pomp, display, and pageantry, under the inspiration of music and with the admiration of the throng; not so with the army of industrial toilers who have been fighting humanity's battles unhonored and unsung.

It will be well indeed if the teachers have the courage of their convictions and face all that the labor unions have faced with the same courage and perseverance.

Today, teachers of America, we stand at the parting of the ways. Democracy is not on trial, but America is.

> *Our whole life is but one great school; from the cradle to the grave we are all learners; nor will our education be finished until we die.*
>
> *—Ann Plato, 1841*

Margaret Haley, *from "Why Teachers Should Organize." The daughter of a labor activist, Haley began teaching in country schools at the age of sixteen. In her early twenties, she moved to Chicago and taught in the city's impoverished meatpacking district until 1900, when she began working full-time for the Chicago Teachers' Federation. At a 1901 meeting of the National Education Association, a male organizer dismissed Haley's calls for gender equity in labor movements as hysterical. "I think this audience," she retorted, "will hope with me that such hysteria will become contagious."*

c. 1943: Zipaquirá

SPONTANEOUS EXPERIMENT

I do not know what, in fact, I learned during my captivity in the Liceo Nacional, but the four years of harmonious coexistence with everyone instilled a unitary vision of the nation in me, I discovered how diverse we were and what we were good for, and I learned and never forgot that the entire country was in fact the sum total of each one of us.

I felt as if I were living a dream, for I had not aspired to a scholarship because I wanted to study but in order to maintain my independence from any other involvement and remain on good terms with my family. The certainty of three meals a day was enough to suppose that in this refuge for the poor, we lived better than in our own houses, under a regime of supervised autonomy less obvious than domestic power. A market system functioned in the dining room that allowed each student to arrange his portions as he chose. Money had no value. The two eggs at breakfast were the most sought-after coin, because with them you could buy at a profit any other dish from the three meals. Each thing had its exact equivalent, and nothing disturbed that legitimate commerce. Even more, I do not remember a single fistfight for any reason during the four years I boarded there.

The teachers, who ate at another table in the same room, were not averse to personal exchanges, for they still carried with them the habits of their own recent schools. The majority were bachelors, or lived there without their wives, and their salaries were almost as meager as the allowances from our families. They complained about the food with as much volubility as we did, and in a dangerous crisis, the possibility arose of our conspiring with some of them on a hunger strike. Only when they received gifts or had guests from outside did they permit themselves inspired dishes that broke down our equality on that one occasion. I believe these fluid relationships between teachers and students were the result in part of the recent reform in education, of which little remained in history, but that did serve at least to simplify protocols for us. Age differences were reduced, the rules about wearing a tie were relaxed, and no one was ever alarmed again because teachers and students had a few drinks together and attended the same Saturday dances with girls.

Our mathematics teacher, with his learning and harsh sense of humor, turned classes into a terrifying fiesta. His name was Joaquín Giraldo Santa, and he was the first Colombian to obtain a doctorate in mathematics. To my misfortune, and despite my great efforts and his, I never succeeded in integrating into his class. People used to say in those days that poetic vocations interfered with mathematics, and in the end I not only believed it but was shipwrecked in the discipline. Geometry was more merciful, perhaps on account of its literary prestige. Arithmetic, on the other hand, behaved with hostile simplicity. Even today, in order to do a mental calculation, I have to break numbers into their easiest components, in particular seven and nine, whose tables I never could memorize. So in order to add seven and four, I take two from seven, add four to the five I have left, and then I add on the two: eleven! Multiplication always failed me because I never could remember the numbers I had in mind. I dedicated my best efforts to algebra, not only out of respect for its classical heritage but because of my affection for and terror of the teacher. It was useless. I failed each trimester, made it up twice, and failed in another illicit attempt that they conceded to me out of charity.

Three of the most self-sacrificing instructors taught languages. The first was the English teacher, Mister Abella, a pure Caribbean with perfect Oxonian diction and a somewhat eccle-

> *We must not believe the many, who say that only free persons ought to be educated, but we should rather believe the philosophers, who say that only the educated are free.*
>
> —*Epictetus, c. 108*



Milarepa, Tibet, fourteenth century.

siastical fervor for *Webster's Dictionary*, which he would recite with his eyes closed. His successor was Héctor Figueroa, a good young teacher with a feverish passion for the boleros that we would sing in harmony during recess. I did the best I could in the stupor of classes and on the final examination, but I believe my good grade was not because of Shakespeare so much as Leo Marini and Hugo Romani, the Argentine singers of boleros responsible for so many paradises and so many suicides of love. The fourth-year French teacher, Monsieur Antonio Yelá Alban, found me intoxicated by detective novels. His classes bored me as much as all the rest, but his opportune references to street French helped me to not die of hunger in Paris ten years later.

The majority of the teachers had been trained at the Normal Superior under the direction of Dr. José Francisco Socarrás, a psychiatrist from San Juan del César bent on replacing the clerical pedagogy of a century of Conservative governments with a humanistic rationalism. Manuel Cuello del Río was a radical Marxist who, perhaps for that reason, admired Lin Yutang and believed in apparitions of the dead. The library of Carlos Julio Calderón, presided



Covid-19 protocols at Collège La Providence, Normandy, 2020. Photograph by Jean Gaumy.

over by his countryman José Eustasio Rivera, author of *The Vortex*, was divided into equal parts Greek classics, Latin American members of Stone and Sky, and romantics from everywhere. Thanks to all of them, the few of us who were assiduous readers read Saint John of the Cross or José María Vargas Vila, as well as the apostles of the proletarian revolution. Gonzalo Ocampo, the social sciences instructor, had a good political library in his room that circulated without malice in the classrooms of the older students, but I never understood why *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* by Friedrich Engels was studied in the arid afternoons of political economy and not in literature classes as the epic poem of a beautiful human adventure. During recreation periods, Guillermo López Guerra read *Anti-Dühring*, also by Engels, lent to him by Professor Gonzalo Ocampo. But when I asked him for it so I could discuss it with López Guerra, Ocampo said he would not do me that bad turn with a great tome fundamental to the progress of humanity but so long and boring it might not pass into history. Perhaps this ideological swapping contributed to the *liceo*'s bad reputation as a laboratory of political perversion. But I needed half a lifetime to realize it might have been more of a spontaneous experiment to frighten away the weak and immunize the strong against all kinds of dogmatisms.

Gabriel García Márquez, *from* Living to Tell the Tale. *The eldest of eleven children, García Márquez spent his first eight years living with his maternal grandparents in the Colombian town of Aracataca, where he learned to read at the local Montessori school. Elsewhere in this autobiography—first published in Spanish in 2002, thirty years after García Márquez was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature—he writes, "I do not believe there is a method better than the Montessorian for making children sensitive to the beauties of the world and awakening their curiosity regarding the secrets of life."*

1741: London

BOOK CLUB

From Mrs. B. to Lady Davers

My Dear Lady,

Mr. B. has just put into my hands Mr. Locke's treatise on education, and he commands me to give him my thoughts upon it in writing. He has a very high regard for this author and tells me that my tenderness for Billy will make me think some of the first advice given in it a little harsh; but although he has not read it through, having only dipped into it here and there, he believes from the name of the author that I cannot have a better directory; and my opinion of it, after I have well considered it, will inform him, he says, of my own capacity and prudence, and how far he may rely upon both in the point of a *first education*.

I asked, if I might not be excused writing, only making my observations, here and there, to himself, as I found occasion? But he said, "You will yourself, my dear, better consider the subject and be more a mistress of it, and I shall the better attend to your reasonings when put into writing; and surely, Pamela, you may, in such an important point as this, as well oblige *me* with a little of your penmanship, as your other dear friends."

After this, your ladyship will judge I had not another word to say. He cuts one to the heart when he speaks so seriously.

I have looked a little into it. It is a book quite accommodated to my case, being written to a gentleman, the author's friend, for the regulation of his conduct toward his children. But how shall I do if in such a famed and renowned author I see already some few things which I think want clearing up? Won't it look like intolerable vanity in me to find fault with such a genius as Mr. Locke?

I must on this occasion give your ladyship the particulars of a short conversation between your brother and me, which, however, perhaps, will not be to my advantage, because it will show you what a teasing body I can be if I am indulged. But Mr. B. will not spoil me neither in that way, I dare say! Your ladyship will see this in the very dialogue I shall give you.

Thus it was. I had been reading in Mr. Locke's book, and Mr. B. asked me how I liked it?

"Exceedingly well, sir. But I have a proposal to make, which, if you will be pleased to comply with it, will give me a charming opportunity of understanding Mr. Locke."

"What is your proposal, my dear? I see it is some very particular one, by that sweet earnestness in your look."

"Why, so it is, sir; and I must know whether you are in high good humor before I make it. I think you look grave upon me, and my proposal will not then do, I'm sure."

> *The only function of a school is to make self-education easier.*
>
> —*Isaac Asimov, 1974*

"You have all the amusing ways of your sex, my dear Pamela. But tell me what you would say? You know I don't love suspense."

"Maybe you're busy, sir. Perhaps I break in upon you. I believe you were going into your closet."

"True woman! How you love to put one upon the tenters! Yet my life for yours, by your parade, what I just now thought important is some pretty trifle! Speak it at once, or I'll be angry with you," and tapped my cheek.

"Well, I wish I had not come just now! I see you are not in a good humor enough for my proposal. So, pray, sir, excuse me till tomorrow."

He took my hand and led me to his closet, calling me his pretty impertinent; and then urging me, I said, "You know, sir, I have not been used to the company of children. Your dear Billy will not make me fit, for a long time, to judge of any part of education. I can learn of the charming boy nothing but the baby conduct: but now, if I might take into the house some little master of three or four years old, or miss of five or six, I should watch over all their little ways; and now reading a chapter in the *child*, and now one in

1977: Pyongyang

CIVICS CLASS

The kernel of communist ideology is the class consciousness of the working class, and the main content of communist education is class education. By intensifying class education, we should make sure that all the students fight selflessly for the interests of the working class with an unwavering working-class viewpoint and on a firm working-class stand. It is particularly important to educate them to hate the enemies of the revolution. Those who do not hate the enemies of the revolution cannot fight with determination against them, nor can they become true revolutionaries. By bringing the students to hate imperialism and the landowner and capitalist classes, we should make certain that they fight resolutely against both our class enemies and the system of exploitation.

Collectivism is the basis of socialism and communism and a principle that guides the actions of communists. We should educate all the students to outgrow individualism and selfishness and to work, study, and live according to the collectivist principle of "One for all and all for one," and fight with devotion for society and the people, for the interests of the party and the revolution.

A love of work is a salient characteristic of the communist. All students should be taught to regard work as honorable and sacred, to enjoy work, to observe labor discipline willingly, and to participate conscientiously in any common endeavor for the good of the collective and society.

Education in socialist patriotism should be improved. Socialist patriotism is the spirit of loving the socialist homeland with the working-class state power, socialist system, independent national economy, and brilliant national culture. All students should be encouraged to be proud of their nation, have a deep love of their country and people, cherish their fine national heritage and traditions, and be willing to sacrifice themselves in the fight for the prosperity and progress of the socialist homeland. Students should be taught to take loving care of their desks and chairs and, further, to treasure all communal property of the state and society and manage the nation's economic life carefully and assiduously.

Kim Il-Sung, *from* Theses on Socialist Education. *Born in Japanese-occupied Korea in 1912, Kim grew up in Manchuria, fought with the Korean guerrilla resistance, and received military training in the Soviet Union. He returned to North Korea in 1945, and with Stalin's support invaded American-occupied South Korea in 1950, leading to three years of war. In 1973 Kim launched the Three Revolutions Movement, a three-pronged approach to development that focused on culture, technology, and ideology.*

the *book*, I can look forward, and with advantage, into the subject, and go through all the parts of education tolerably, for one of my capacity; for, sir, I can, by my own defects, and what I have wished to mend, know how to judge of and supply that part of life which carries a child up to eleven or twelve years of age, which was mine, when my lady took me."

"A pretty thought, Pamela! But tell me, who will part with their child, think you? Would *you*, if it were your case, although ever so well assured of the advantages your little one would reap by it? For don't you consider that the child ought to be wholly subjected to your authority? That its father or mother ought seldom to see it, because it should think itself absolutely dependent upon you? And where, my dear, will you meet with parents so resigned? Besides, one would have the child descended of genteel parents, and not such as could do nothing for it; otherwise the turn of mind and education you would give it might do it more harm than good."

"All this, sir, is very true. But have you no other objection if one could find a genteely descended young master? And would you join to persuade his papa to give me up his power only from three months to three months, as I liked, and the child liked, and as the papa approved of my proceedings?"

"This is so reasonable, with these last conditions, Pamela, that I should be pleased with

your notion if it could be put into practice, because the child would be benefited by your instruction, and you would be improved in an art, which I could wish to see you an adept in."

"But perhaps, sir, you had rather it were a girl than a boy?"

"I had, my dear, if a girl could be found whose parents would give her up to you; but I suppose you have some boy in your head, by your putting it upon that sex at first."

"Let me see, sir, you say you are in a good humor! Let me see if you be"—looking boldly in his face.

"What now," with some little impatience, "would the pretty fool be at?"

"Only, sir, that you have nothing to do but to speak the word, and there is a child whose papa and mama, too, I am sure, would consent to give up to me for my own instruction, as well as for her sake; and if, to speak in the scripture phrase, I have found *grace in your sight*, kind sir, speak this word to the dear child's papa."

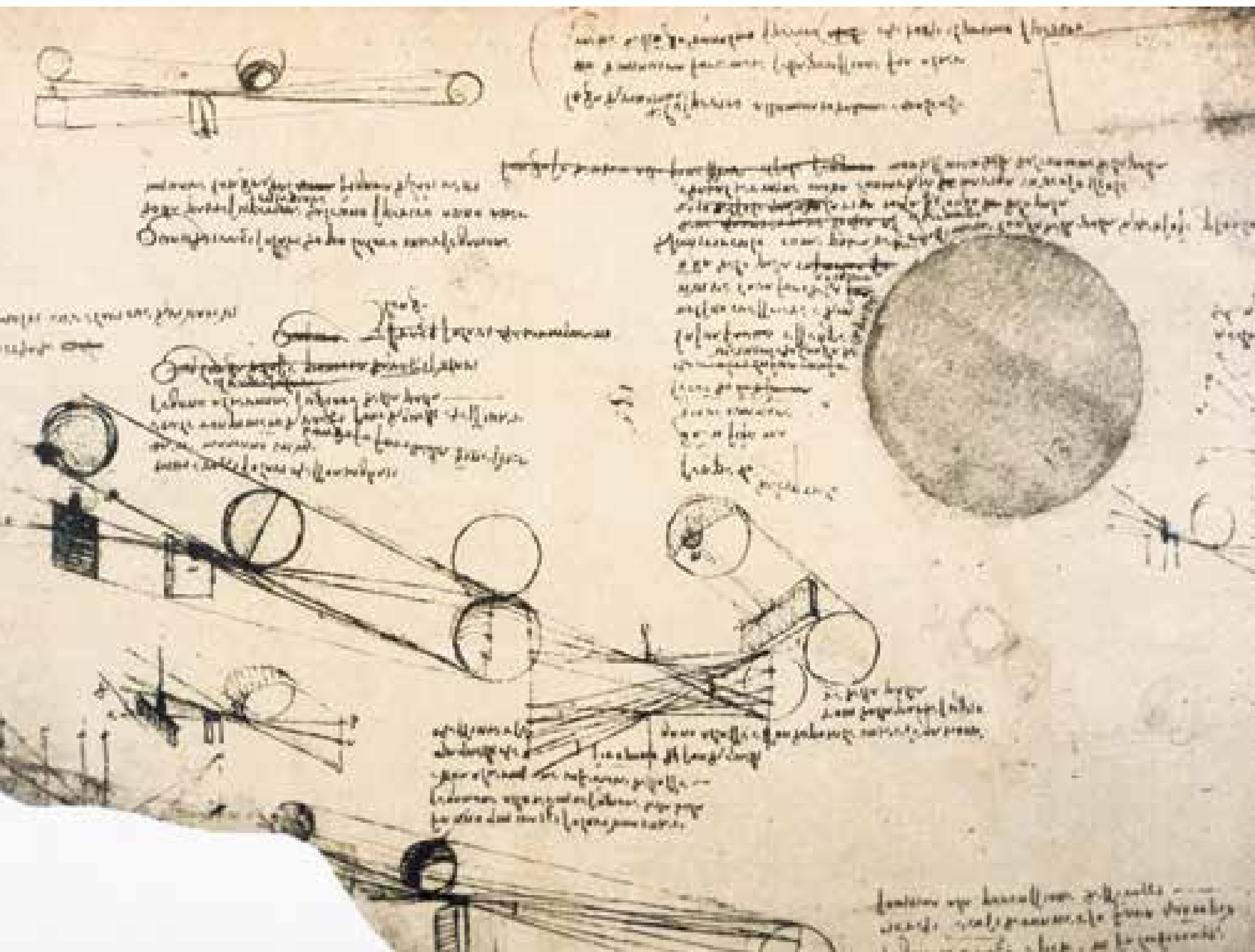
"And have you thus come over me, Pamela! Go, I am half-angry with you for leading me on in this manner against myself. This looks so artful that I won't love you!"

"Dear sir!"

"And dear madam, too! Begone, I say! You have surprised me by art, when your talent is nature, and you should keep to that!"

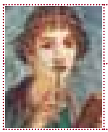
Samuel Richardson, *from* Pamela. *Around the age of thirteen, Richardson was employed by his female friends to ghostwrite their love letters. In 1741, nearly forty years later, having established a successful London printing business, he published* Letters Written to and for Particular Friends, *an epistolographic manual featuring the correspondence of fictional characters; several of the letters anticipate the plot of* Pamela, *which he began drafting around the same time. He was, writes one biographer, "not one of those who make genius an excuse for idleness."*

Mechanical drawings from the *Codex Atlanticus*, by Leonardo da Vinci, c. 1500.

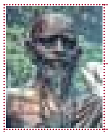


Study Abroad

Educational voyages



Name	Egeria
Travel Dates	381–84
Itinerary	A Christian woman born in either Aquitaine or Spain, Egeria retraced the path of the Israelites during their exodus from Egypt, spent time at the Sea of Galilee, and visited Jerusalem.
Lessons Learned	Writing home to a community of religious sisters, Egeria described climbing Mount Sinai by foot, "the ascent being impossible in the saddle, and yet I did not feel the toil…because I realized that the desire which I had was being fulfilled at God's bidding."



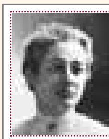
Name	Faxian
Travel Dates	c. 399–c. 412
Itinerary	Around the age of sixty, the Buddhist monk Faxian traveled by foot across the Pamir Mountains to centers of Buddhist learning in northwestern India.
Lessons Learned	For ten years Faxian learned Sanskrit and transcribed Buddhist texts, including the Nirvana Sutra. Carrying several Buddhist scriptures, he returned to China around 412, landing at the Shandong Peninsula after a two-hundred-day journey. He died ten years later at the age of thirty-five.



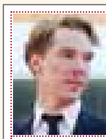
Name	Hester Lynch Piozzi
Travel Dates	1784–87
Itinerary	After marrying an Italian singer, Piozzi left England to tour Europe and published an account of her journey in 1789.
Lessons Learned	While in Italy, she viewed the Venetian doge's private art collection, visited the ruins of the Roman Forum, and watched Mount Vesuvius erupt. "Power unlimited once, now changed to a childish display of empty splendor," she wrote in a 1785 letter, "are the images with which Rome impresses one's imagination."



Name	Bayard Taylor
Travel Dates	1844–46
Itinerary	Haunted from early childhood by an "enthusiastic desire of visiting the Old World," Taylor left for Europe in 1844 with $140 and spent two years traveling around the continent by foot.
Lessons Learned	"I have seen no city yet which so forcibly reminds me of the past," Taylor wrote in one letter from Prague. "In a word, it is, like Venice, a fallen city; though, as in Venice, the improving spirit of the age is beginning to give it a little life."



Name	Florence Merriam Bailey
Travel Dates	1889–94
Itinerary	Bailey conducted field research in Southern California by horse and published her third bird-watching guide, *A-Birding on a Bronco*, in 1896.
Lessons Learned	On viewing a crushed wren's nest during one of her rides, she wrote, "You become so much interested in the families you are watching that you feel as if their troubles were yours, and are haunted by the fear that they will think you have something to do with their accidents."



Name	Benedict Cumberbatch
Travel Dates	1995–96
Itinerary	After deferring his university education, Cumberbatch traveled to Darjeeling, where he taught English and learned to meditate at a Buddhist monastery.
Lessons Learned	On a hiking trip to Nepal, Cumberbatch and four friends became lost and suffered from altitude sickness and amoebic dysentery. "We were woefully underprepared," Cumberbatch later said. "I had simply an extra scarf my mother had knitted me and a piece of cheese."



Tibetan Buddhist nuns preparing for class at Yarchen Gar, Sichuan, China, 2008. Photograph by Michael Yamashita.

c. 533: Ravenna

SPELL-CHECK

You who are called fathers should be interested in all that concerns the education of your sons. We hear by certain whisperings that the teachers of eloquence at Rome are not receiving their proper reward, and that the sums appointed to be paid to the masters of schools are lessened by the haggling of some persons.

Grammar is the noble foundation of all literature, the glorious mother of eloquence. As a virtuous man is offended by any act of vice, as a musician is pained by a discordant note, so does the grammarian in a moment perceive a false concord.

The grammatical art is not used by barbarous kings: it abides peculiarly with legitimate sovereigns. Other nations have arms; the lords of the Romans alone have eloquence. Hence sounds the trumpet for the legal fray in the Forum. Hence comes the eloquence of so many chiefs of the state. Hence, to say nothing more, even this discourse that is now addressed to you.

Wherefore let the teacher of grammar and of rhetoric, if he be found suitable for his work and obey the decrees of the prefect of the city, be supported by your authority and suffer no diminution of his salary.

To prevent his being dependent in any way on the caprice of his employer, let him receive half his salary at the end of half a year, and his *annonae* at the customary times. If the person whose business it is to pay him neglects this order, he shall be charged interest on the arrears.

The grammarian is a man to whom every hour unemployed is misery, and it is a shame that such a man should have to wait on the caprice of a public functionary before he gets his pay. We provide for the salaries of the play-actors, who minister only to the amusement of the public; and how much more for these men, the molders of the style and character of our youth! Therefore let them henceforward not have to try the philosophical problem of thinking about two things at once but, with their minds at ease about their subsistence, devote themselves with all their vigor to the teaching of liberal arts.

Cassiodorus, *from the* Variae. *Born near the end of the fifth century in southern Italy, Cassiodorus was an administrator and draftsman of royal diplomatic correspondence for the Ostrogothic kings Theoderic and Athalaric. Sometime around 537 he published the* Variae, *twelve books of official letters and documents he had composed under aliases, including Athalaric. Around 550 Cassiodorus retired from public service and founded a monastery, where he and his monastic community collected and transcribed manuscripts of both Christian and pagan origin.*

1991: Chicago

SCHOOL OF THOUGHT

At his basketball parties, Ravelstein passed pizza slices among his graduate-student guests, his bald head swiveling toward the busy, colored TV screen behind him. His lot, his crew, his disciples, his clones who dressed as he did, smoked the same Marlboros, and found in these entertainments a common ground between the fan clubs of childhood and the Promised Land of the intellect toward which Ravelstein, their Moses and their Socrates, led them. Michael Jordan was now an American cult figure—small boys saved his apple cores as relics. A children's crusade might be possible even in the present age. Jordan, the papers said, had "bionic" powers. He could suspend himself in the air out of the reach of blockers, and you could trace his deliberations in his actions, with time enough to change hands while he soared—a man who earned $80 million a year, not a cult figure but a hero who moved the hearts of the masses.

Inevitably, Ravelstein was seen by the young men he was training as the intellectual counterpart to Jordan. The man who introduced them to the powers and subtleties of Thucydides and analyzed the role of Alcibiades in the Sicilian campaign as no one else could—a man who expounded the *Gorgias* to his seminar, literally in sight of the steel mills and the ash heaps and street filth of Gary, its ore boats coming and going across the water—could also hang in the air, levitating just like Jordan. A man of idiosyncrasies and kinks, of gobbling greed for penny candies or illegal Havana cigars, was himself a Homeric prodigy.

Ravelstein the host coming now with a cheese platter, saying, "What about a chunk of this Vermont cheddar…?" ineptly brought the cheese knife, with uncontrollable nervous discharges in his fingers, down on the five-pound round of Cabot's supersharp.

When the cellular telephone in his trouser pocket rang, he drew apart to exchange a word or two with somebody in Hong Kong or Hawaii. One of his informants was calling in a bulletin. There were no security violations. Top secrets he neither heard nor asked to hear. What he loved was to have the men he had trained appointed to important positions; real

African American school in Anthoston, Kentucky, 1916. Photograph by Lewis W. Hine.



life confirming his judgments. He'd go aside with his portable phone, and then he'd return to tell us, "Colin Powell and Baker have advised the president not to send the troops all the way to Baghdad. Bush will announce it tomorrow. They're afraid of a few casualties. They send out a terrific army and give a demonstration of up-to-date high-tech warfare that flesh and blood can't stand up to. But then they leave the dictatorship in place and steal away…"

It gave Ravelstein the greatest satisfaction to have the inside dope. Like the child in the Lawrence poem sitting under a "great black piano *appassionato*," "in the boom of the tingling strings," while the child's mother plays.

"Well, that's the latest from the Defense Department…"

Most of us knew that his main source was Philip Gorman. Gorman's academic father had strongly objected to the Ravelstein seminars in which Philip was enrolled. Respectable professors of political theory had told old Gorman that Ravelstein was off the wall, that he seduced and corrupted his students. "The paterfamilias was warned against the buggerfamilias," Ravelstein said.

Of course old Gorman would be too rigid to be grateful that his son did not go into business administration, Abe said. "Well, Philip is right now one of the secretary's closest advisers. He has a powerful mind and a real grasp of great politics, this kid, whereas statisticians are as common as minnows."

Young Philip was one of the boys Ravelstein had educated over a span of thirty years. His pupils had turned into historians, teachers, journalists, experts, civil servants, think tankers. Ravelstein had produced (indoctrinated) three or four generations of graduates. Moreover, his young men were mad for him. They didn't limit themselves to his doctrines, his interpretations, but imitated his manners and tried to walk and talk as he did—freely, wildly, pungently, with a brilliancy as close to his as they could make it. The very young ones—those who could afford the prices—also bought their clothes at Lanvin or Hermès, had their shirts made on Jermyn Street by Turnbull & Asser ("Kisser & Asser," as I revised it). They smoked with Ravelstein's erratic gestures. They played the same compact discs. He cured them of their taste for rock, and they now listened to Mozart, Rossini, or, further back, Albinoni and Frescobaldi ("on the original instruments"). They sold their collections of the Beatles and the Grateful Dead and listened instead to Maria Callas singing *La traviata*.

> *Reading is learning, but applying is also learning and the more important kind of learning at that.*
>
> *—Mao Zedong, 1936*

"It's only a matter of time before Phil Gorman has cabinet rank, and a damn good thing for the country." Ravelstein had given his boys a good education, in these degraded times—"the fourth wave of modernity." They could be trusted with classified information, the state secrets they naturally would *not* pass on to their teacher who had opened their eyes to "Great Politics." You could see the changes their responsibilities had made in them. Their heads looked more firm and mature. They were absolutely right to withhold information. They knew what a gossip he was. But he himself had very important secrets to keep, information of a private, dangerous nature that only a few could be trusted with. Teaching, as Ravelstein understood teaching, was tricky work. You couldn't afford to let the facts be generally known. But unless the facts *were* known, no real life was possible. So you made your choices with a jeweler's touch.

Saul Bellow, *from* Ravelstein. *Bellow graduated from Northwestern University in 1937 and worked for the Federal Writers' Project,* Encyclopedia Britannica, *and the merchant marine before making a name as a novelist. In 2000 he published* Ravelstein, *basing the title character on the late philosopher Allan Bloom, a close friend. In his foreword to Bloom's 1987 best seller* The Closing of the American Mind, *Bellow wrote of his fear that "the book of the world, so richly studied by autodidacts, is being closed out by the 'learned' who are raising walls of opinions to shut the world out."*

1943: Hull

THE SCHOOL IN AUGUST

The cloakroom pegs are empty now,
And locked the classroom door,
The hollow desks are dim with dust,
And slow across the floor
A sunbeam creeps between the chairs
Till the sun shines no more.

Who did their hair before this glass?
Who scratched "Elaine loves Jill"
One drowsy summer sewing-class
With scissors on the sill?
Who practiced this piano
Whose notes are now so still?

Ah, notices are taken down,
And scorebooks stowed away,
And seniors grow tomorrow
From the juniors today,
And even swimming groups can fade,
Games mistresses turn gray.

Philip Larkin, *from* Collected Poems. *After graduating from Oxford in 1943, Larkin took a job as a district librarian in Shropshire. In 1955, the same year he published his second collection of poetry, he was hired by the University of Hull, where he remained as a librarian for almost thirty years, even as his reputation as a poet continued to grow. In 1984, a year before Larkin's death, the British Library offered him the title of poet laureate of the UK, which he declined. "I dream about that sometimes," he reportedly told the novelist Kingsley Amis of the honor, "and wake up screaming."*

Student facing punishment, fresco from the House of Julia Felix, Pompeii, first century.



1538: Bruges

BANNED BOOKS

Why do you read about other people's loves and imperceptibly absorb venomous allurements and enticements little by little, and often with full consciousness of what you are doing? For there are some who have already lost all mental equilibrium, who give themselves to this reading in order to find pleasant gratification in amorous reveries of this kind. For such girls it would have been preferable not only that they had never learned literature but that they had lost their eyes so that they could not read, and their ears so that they could not hear. How much better would it be for them to enter into life blind and deaf, as our Lord says in the gospel, rather than to be cast into the fire of hell with both eyes and both ears.

This kind of girl is a disgrace not only to Christians but would be an object of shame and hatred even to the pagans. Wherefore I am all the more astonished that devout preachers, although often inveighing in tragic tones against petty matters, do not decry this practice in their every sermon. I marvel that wise fathers permit this to their daughters, husbands concede it to their wives, and public morals and institutions ignore the fact that women become addicted to vice through reading. It is fitting that human laws and magistrates not only concern themselves with the courts and civil disputes but also oversee public and private morals.

They should also concern themselves with pernicious books. New ones appear every day, like the *Decameron* of Boccaccio. All these books were written by idle, unoccupied, ignorant men, the slaves of vice and filth. I wonder what it is that delights us in these books, unless it be that we are attracted by indecency. Learning is not to be expected from authors who never saw even a shadow of learning. As for their storytelling, what pleasure is to be derived from the things they invent, full of lies and stupidity? One hero killed twenty single-handed, another slew thirty, and still another hero, left for dead with six hundred gaping wounds, suddenly rises to his feet and the next day, restored to health and strength, lays two giants low in a single battle, then proceeds on his way, laden with gold, silver, silks, and jewels in such quantity that even a cargo ship could not carry them.

What madness it is to be drawn and fascinated by these tales! There is nothing clever here except for some words taken from the secret archives of Venus that are spoken at the propitious moment to impress and arouse the woman you love if she shows some resistance. If they are read for that reason, it would be better to write books on the art of whoring.

I never heard of anyone who liked these books except one who had never come in contact with good books. I have read some of them myself but never found any trace of good intent or superior talent.

Surely one can only deride the madness of husbands who allow their wives to read these books so that they may be more clever in their depravity. A woman should avoid these books as she would a viper or a scorpion. And if a woman is so enthralled by the reading of these books that she will not put them down, they should not only be wrested from her hands but, if she shows unwillingness to peruse better books, her parents or friends should see to it that she read no books at all and become unaccustomed to the reading of literature—and, if possible, unlearn it altogether. For it is better to be deprived of a good thing than to make ill use of it.

Juan Luis Vives, *from* The Education of a Christian Woman. *Born in Valencia and educated in Paris, Vives lectured in the humanities at the University of Leuven before being hired as a tutor and reader at the court of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon in 1523. Four years later, when Henry attempted to divorce Catherine, Vives was imprisoned for supporting the queen, to whom he had dedicated this treatise on women's education. "He is versed in branches of knowledge of the first importance," Thomas More wrote of him in a 1518 letter to Erasmus. "Who is there who surpasses Vives?"*

The Prospective Student's Guide to Medieval Universities

A handbook for time travelers



Schola Medica Salernitana

est. c. 850

Best for
aspiring doctors and surgeons

Worst for
bookish types

Work alongside renowned physicians at the only accredited medical program in southern Italy, but don't expect any formal classroom instruction or a robust arts curriculum.

Notable Scholars

Gilles de Corbeil, *French royal physician and poet*

Constantine the African, *prolific translator of Arabic medical texts*



University of Bologna

est. 1088

Best for
aspiring lawyers and politicians

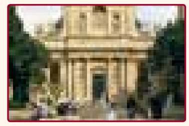
Worst for
the squeamish

Practice politics by joining one of the many powerful student organizations. Fair warning: you may overhear anatomy students talking about human dissection over lunch.

Notable Scholars

Saint Thomas Becket, *archbishop of Canterbury and high-profile martyr*

Several popes, including **Gregory XIII** *and* **Innocent IX**



University of Paris

est. 1150

Best for
aesthetes and xenophiles

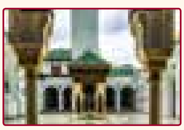
Worst for
aspiring doctors and civil attorneys

Receive a premier education in logic, theology, or the arts as part of a vibrant international student body. The school lags behind its peers in medicine and the law—especially civil law, the study of which Pope Honorius III prohibited in 1219.

Notable Scholars

Saint Thomas Aquinas, *philosopher and father of Thomism*

Peter Abelard, *philosopher, poet, and inventor of the concept of limbo*



University of al-Qarawiyin

est. 859

Best for
connoisseurs of architecture

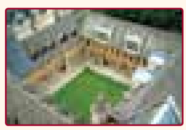
Worst for
women

The ornately decorated al-Qarawiyin madrassa in Fès was founded by a woman, Fatima al-Fihri of Kairouan, but women won't have any luck gaining entry there—or to any other medieval university.

Notable Scholars

Pope Sylvester II, *first French pope; might have introduced Arabic numerals to Europe*

Ibn Khaldun, *author of the definitive history of Muslim North Africa*



University of Oxford

est. 1096

Best for
aspiring power brokers

Worst for
the faint of heart

Located midway between Northampton and Southampton, the university is a seat of cultural, ecclesiastical, and political influence. One drawback: hostile locals, who lynched two students in 1209 and killed sixty-three scholars in the Saint Scholastica Day riot of 1355.

Notable Scholars

Roger Bacon, *or Doctor Mirabilis, who proposed a flying machine before Leonardo da Vinci*

William of Ockham, *or Doctor Invincibilis, creator of Occam's razor*



University of Sankore

est. c. 1100

Best for
perpetual students

Worst for
self-directed students

Stay insulated from the hardships of medieval life for as long as possible—on average, scholars at Timbuktu's Sankore madrassa take a decade to complete their studies. Expect mandatory coursework in philosophy, Islamic law, and Arabic grammar; students also need to memorize the Quran.

Notable Scholars

Ahmed Baba, *legal scholar and author of sixty books*

Mohammed Bagayogo, *renowned lecturer and professor*

2021: Austin, TX

TOPIC SENTENCE

For any social studies course in the required curriculum:

(1) a teacher may not be compelled to discuss a particular current event or widely debated and currently controversial issue of public policy or social affairs;

(2) a teacher who chooses to discuss a topic described by Subdivision (1) shall, to the best of the teacher's ability, strive to explore the topic from diverse and contending perspectives without giving deference to any one perspective;

(3) a school district, open-enrollment charter school, or teacher may not require, make part of a course, or award a grade or course credit, including extra credit, for a student's:

(a) political activism, lobbying, or efforts to persuade members of the legislative or executive branch at the federal, state, or local level to take specific actions by direct communication; or

(b) participation in any internship, practicum, or similar activity involving social or public policy advocacy; and

(4) a teacher, administrator, or other employee of a state agency, school district, or open-enrollment charter school may not:

(a) be required to engage in training, orientation, or therapy that presents any form of race or sex stereotyping or blame on the basis of race or sex;

(b) require or make part of a course the concept that:

(i) one race or sex is inherently superior to another race or sex;

(ii) an individual, by virtue of the individual's race or sex, is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously;

(iii) an individual should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment solely or partly because of the individual's race;

(iv) members of one race or sex cannot and should not attempt to treat others without respect to race or sex;

(v) an individual's moral character, standing, or worth is necessarily determined by the individual's race or sex;

(vi) an individual, by virtue of the individual's race or sex, bears responsibility for actions committed in the past by other members of the same race or sex;

(vii) an individual should feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress on account of the individual's race or sex;

(viii) meritocracy or traits such as a hard work ethic are racist or sexist or were created by members of a particular race to oppress members of another race;

> *The schools we go to are reflections of the society that created them. Nobody is going to give you the education you need to overthrow them. Nobody is going to teach you your true history, teach you your true heroes, if they know that that knowledge will help set you free.*
>
> *—Assata Shakur, 1987*

(ix) the advent of slavery in the territory that is now the United States constituted the true founding of the United States; or

(x) with respect to their relationship to American values, slavery and racism are anything other than deviations from, betrayals of, or failures to live up to the authentic founding principles of the United States, which include liberty and equality; and

(c) require an understanding of the 1619 Project.

From Texas House Bill 3979, "An Act Relating to the Social Studies Curriculum in Public Schools." Legal scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw has defined critical race theory as "a way of seeing, attending to, accounting for, tracing, and analyzing the ways that race is produced." A year after Donald Trump's executive order banning any implication that "our most venerable institutions are inherently sexist and racist" from teaching materials, Texas state representative Steve Toth introduced this bill. Texas governor Greg Abbott noted that it was "a strong move" but "more must be done."



School scene, miniature from *On the Nature of Things*, by Rabanus Maurus, ninth century.

1936: Karelia

LIFE-TRACK MAINTENANCE

When he had first begun to work on the railway, Fyodorov treated metal and machines as he had treated animals and plants: with caution and foresight, trying not only to get to know them but also to outwit them. Then he had realized that such a relationship was insufficient and just wasn't enough. Being with metal and machines required a great deal more sensitivity than being with wild animals or with plants and trees. You can outwit something living, and it will yield to you; you can wound it, and being alive, it will heal; but machines and rails don't yield to cunning—they can be won over only by pure goodness; and you can't afford to wound them, because they don't heal. A break is mortal. And so Fyodorov behaved sensitively and carefully at work; he even avoided slamming the door of his little cabin, closing it silently and delicately, so as not to disturb the iron hinges or loosen their screws.

The railwayman on duty phoned the cabin: Fyodorov was to check the switch and signal "Line clear" so the express could pass. Fyodorov knew the time of the train anyway. He was already looking into the forest, along the dark cutting where the track lay. There was no moon, and the stars were high and faint, but the rails shone clear and far, as if they were gathering, out of all the poverty of darkness, the light that had been scattered in the gloom. Fyodorov lay down with his ear to the rail and heard the metal's eternal song—its response to the flow of the air, and to the noise of distant leaves and branches. The rails were singing in tune—the whole stretch was intact and healthy. But gradually this steady, wavelike hum was joined by a vague, extraneous mutter. Then this mutter grew more distinct and insistent; it was almost articulating words. This language was being spoken by a voice that was young and singing, and there were no false notes, no sounds of jangling irritation—proof that there were no cracks in the rails, and that the metal had not been worn away at the joints. The switchman lifted his head from the rail, blew his nose, brushed the dirt off his clothes, and adopted a more serious, dignified expression.

Occasionally, after a train had passed, Fyodorov would pick up some object from the track and try at length to fathom out its significance. Then he would try to imagine the person

it had belonged to, and he would feel at peace only when he had formed in his imagination a clear picture of the unknown passenger who had hurtled by. Thanks to an empty cigarette packet, a key to a tin of food, or a ball of cotton wool, he would find himself thinking about the character, the face, or even the life ambition of the person who had just passed by in the train.

There was no chance now of hearing music from the train or being able to make out a human being. Formerly the water from the toilets had flowed out in a stream, but now it was thin vapor—the speed of the train was tearing it into prickly spray.

All this made Fyodorov sad for the rest of the night. His section of track had no theater and no library; there was only the track inspector's accordion, and the track inspector seldom visited this section and often forgot to bring his accordion with him when he did, even though he had given a written promise to the local trade-union committee to take it with him wherever he went and to go to all the Red Corners and play the new repertoire, omitting the chaos that had been condemned in the Moscow newspapers. One summer a member of the Writers' Union had come and given a talk about the current state of creative dialogue among writers. Fyodorov had asked sixteen questions and had been given *The Travels of Marco Polo* as a present; the writer had then left. The book was extremely interesting; Fyodorov had at once begun reading, from page 26. At the start of a book, a writer is just thinking, and that makes it dull; the most interesting part is the middle, or the end, which was why Fyodorov preferred to choose pages at random—now page 50, now page 214. And although every book is interesting, reading this way makes it even better, and still more interesting, because you have to imagine for yourself everything you have skipped, and you have to compose anew passages that don't make sense or are badly written, just as if you, too, were an author, a member of the Soviet Union's Union of Writers. Fyodorov had been so carried away by one book—*Lime*, or was it *Stone*?—that he had read it from the end all the way to the beginning and had realized that it was a good book but that if you began at the beginning it would be false and ideologically suspect.

For three hours that night, there were no trains; somewhere there had been a delay or an accident. The switchman examined the switch again, checking that the express had done no damage, then went into his cabin, pulled the door to, and played a few notes on his signal horn. But this was unsatisfying. Fyodorov wanted to hear a melody in an orchestra and to watch a spectacle in a theater, so as to have some understanding in his soul about the truth of life and to see the universal horizon.

In the morning, his wife, Katerina Vasilievna, came out to him. "Let me clean the switch for you!" she said. "Maybe someone will notice. Nowadays these things do get noticed. You must try your hardest."

c. 142: Rome

FAVORITE TEACHER

His own Caesar to his teacher,

How much reading those speeches of Gracchus helped me, there's no need for me to say, since you would know best of all—you're the one who encouraged me to read them, with that so learned brain and that so kind nature of yours. But just so your book shouldn't come back to you all by itself with nobody to keep it company, I've sent this little nothing book along with it. Be well, my sweetest teacher, most loving friend; I'm going to owe you whatever I'll ever know of letters. I'm not such an ingrate that I don't understand what you've given me, when you've shown me your own notebooks and when you don't stop leading me down the trail of truth every day and "opening my eyes," as people say. I love you as you deserve to be loved.

Marcus Aurelius, *from a letter to Marcus Cornelius Fronto. Born in Rome in the early second century, Marcus Aurelius was educated by the orator Fronto, who remained the future emperor's intimate friend and confidante. Their written correspondence continued for decades until Fronto's death around 166. "So passionately, by Hercules, am I in love with you," wrote Marcus in an early letter, "and even if you show yourself more forward and facile to others, who are nonlovers, yet will I love you while I have life and health."*

"There's no need," said Fyodorov. "The relief will be here soon. He doesn't need a soubrette!"

"What do you mean—soubrette!" his wife exclaimed furiously. "Who's taught you that word? You didn't know it yesterday. Have you been seeing someone here during the night?"

Fyodorov felt a little frightened. "I read it a year ago in a book. There was this king's daughter—"

"I know, I know about you and your king's daughter. And who was it getting friendly with junior switchwoman Fedotova the other day—right here on the switch? Along comes lover boy—and he sits down on the counterweight and takes her in his arms!"

> *It made me gladsome to be getting some education, it being like a big window opening.*
> *—Mary Webb, 1924*

"It wasn't me!" said Fyodorov. "How could it have been? I was on duty."

"I know it wasn't you!" Fyodorov's wife informed him. "As if I'd let you carry on like that and cause disruption to transport!"

Katerina Vasilievna took a broom and began to sweep the track around the switch. Then she cleaned off every speck of dirt from the switch itself and wiped the crossover and the two blades. The switch looked spick-and-span now, like a pot or a pan belonging to a fastidious old woman.

"I'm going to make an application. I want to be transferred to Bear Hill," Fyodorov informed his wife. "There's a big station there. There's a theater, a club, and a cinema. A man can develop himself there."

"That's all I need! You'll develop yourself there—and then what'll I do? Nowadays there are fine clothes in the shops, the young girls look beautiful. You'll leave me—you'll leave me and the family here in Lobskaya Hill."

Fyodorov reached out to his wife and carefully stroked the gleaming, pretty hair on her head, so that she would not grieve in advance.

"Don't," she said, gently taking his hand away. "You might be seen by a supervisor on a platform wagon. He'll say you're careless and negligent. There's nothing to stop you stroking my hair back at home—but you never remember."

The switchman carried on trying to talk his wife around: "People have merry lives in Bear Hill. One can get oneself educated there, and it's easier to be noticed."

In her mind his wife calculated all the mysteries, losses, and gains, trying to imagine how everything would turn out. "Could you become a renowned transport worker?" she asked.

"Yes," Fyodorov answered obediently.

"All right then," she agreed. "Only I'm frightened you'll stop loving me. What will become of me and our little girl then? I'm getting on now—I'm twenty-four."

She fingered a button on her husband's shirt. In answer Fyodorov touched his wife on the shoulder.

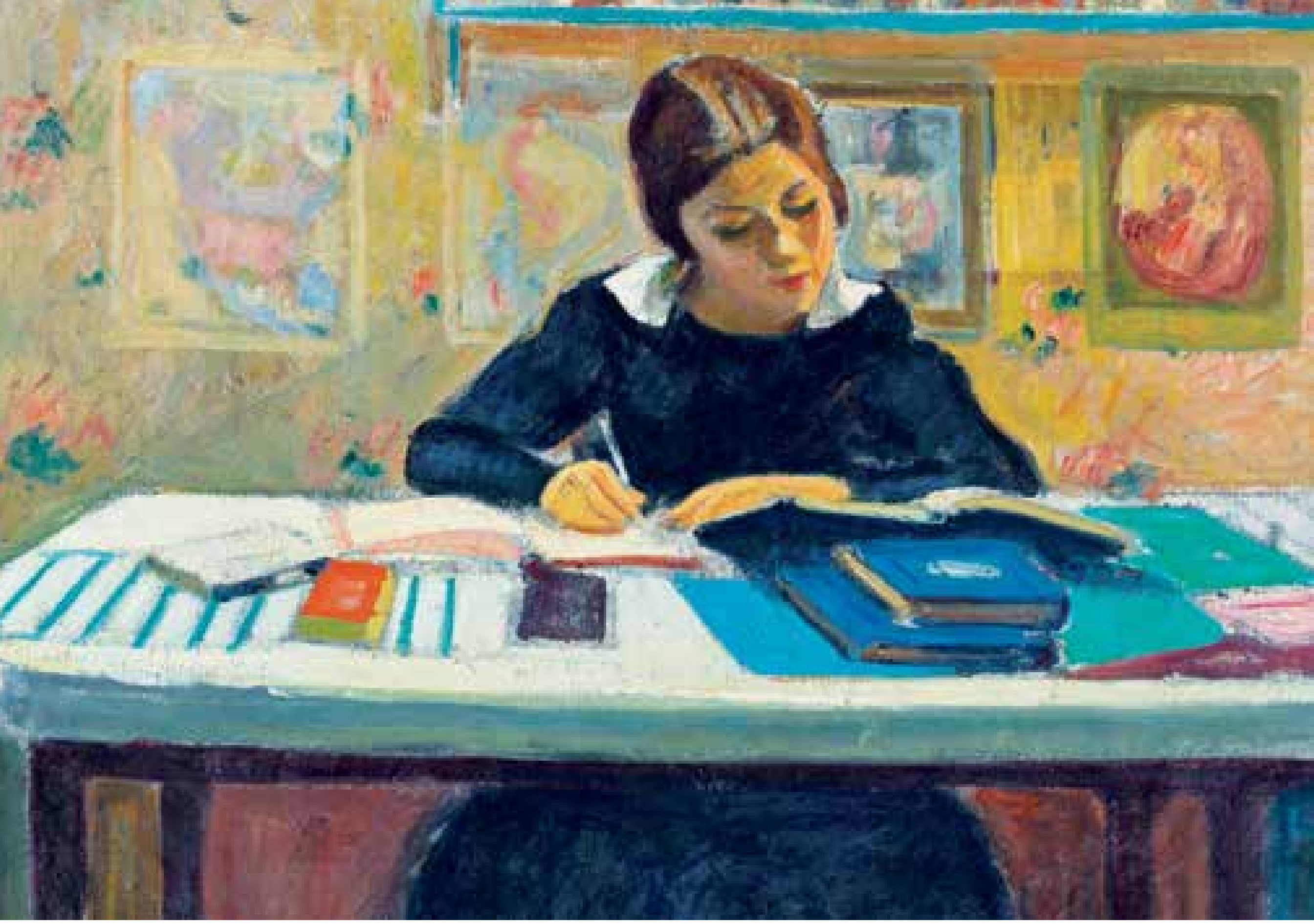
"I won't stop loving you," he said. "I've got a small heart, it hasn't got room for anyone except you. And then you can start studying, you'll like it. You'll become a famous strange woman."

"But it's a long way to Bear Hill," said his wife. "You'll wear yourself out!"

"I'll manage," said Fyodorov. "Bear Hill's a good place. And I like pleasure."

His wife sat down on the rail and thought everything over once more. Would there be anything special up at Bear Hill? "All right," she agreed, "write an application. And get them to give you a raise. And don't go spilling ink on the paper again—if they think you're illiterate, they'll subtract your raise."

Andrey Platonov, *from "Among Animals and Plants." As a teenager, Platonov, the son of a railway engineer, worked for the Southeastern Railway as an engineer's assistant. After the Russian Revolution, he studied electrical engineering and worked for the Red Army, delivering supplies and troops by train. In 1922 he published his first book, a collection of pastoral and proletarian poems. The same year, he wrote, "The phrase about the revolution being the locomotive of history for me turned into a strange and pleasant feeling: recalling it, I worked especially hard on the locomotive."*



The Schoolgirl, by Jean Puy, c. 1933.

c. 1000: Bianliang

READING RAINBOW

To be wealthy you need not purchase fertile fields,
Thousands of tons of corn are to be found in the books.
To build a house, you need not set up high beams,
Golden mansions are to be found in the books.
To find a wife, you need not worry about having good matchmakers,
Maidens as beautiful as jade are to be found in the books.
To travel you need not worry about having servants and attendants,
Large entourages of horses and carriages are to be found in the books.
When a man wishes to fulfill the ambition of his life,
He only needs to diligently study the Six Classics by the window.

Zhenzong, *"Urge to Study." Following a string of humiliating military losses to the Khitan of Inner Mongolia early in his reign, the Song dynasty emperor Zhenzong dedicated himself to his subjects' religious and cultural development. Seven centuries later the Qing dynasty writer Pu Songling wrote a short story about a young man who, taking literally the promises in Zhenzong's exhortation to study, falls in love with an illustration of a woman in a book. Coming to life, the woman introduces herself as Miss Jadesmooth Cheek.*

c. 1915: Nepenthe

SCIENTIFIC METHODS

Mr. Heard enjoyed the luncheon. "The food, the wine, the service—they were faultless; something altogether out of the way," he declared with frank conviction.

"Then you must come again," replied Mr. Keith. "How long did you say you were staying here?"

"Ten days or so."

"I see you are a man of action. Sometimes I wish I were. A little money has made me lazy, I'm afraid. But I do some thinking, and a fair lot of reading. I travel, I observe, I compare. Among other things I observe that our English system of education is all wrong. We ought to return to that old camp-and-court ideal."

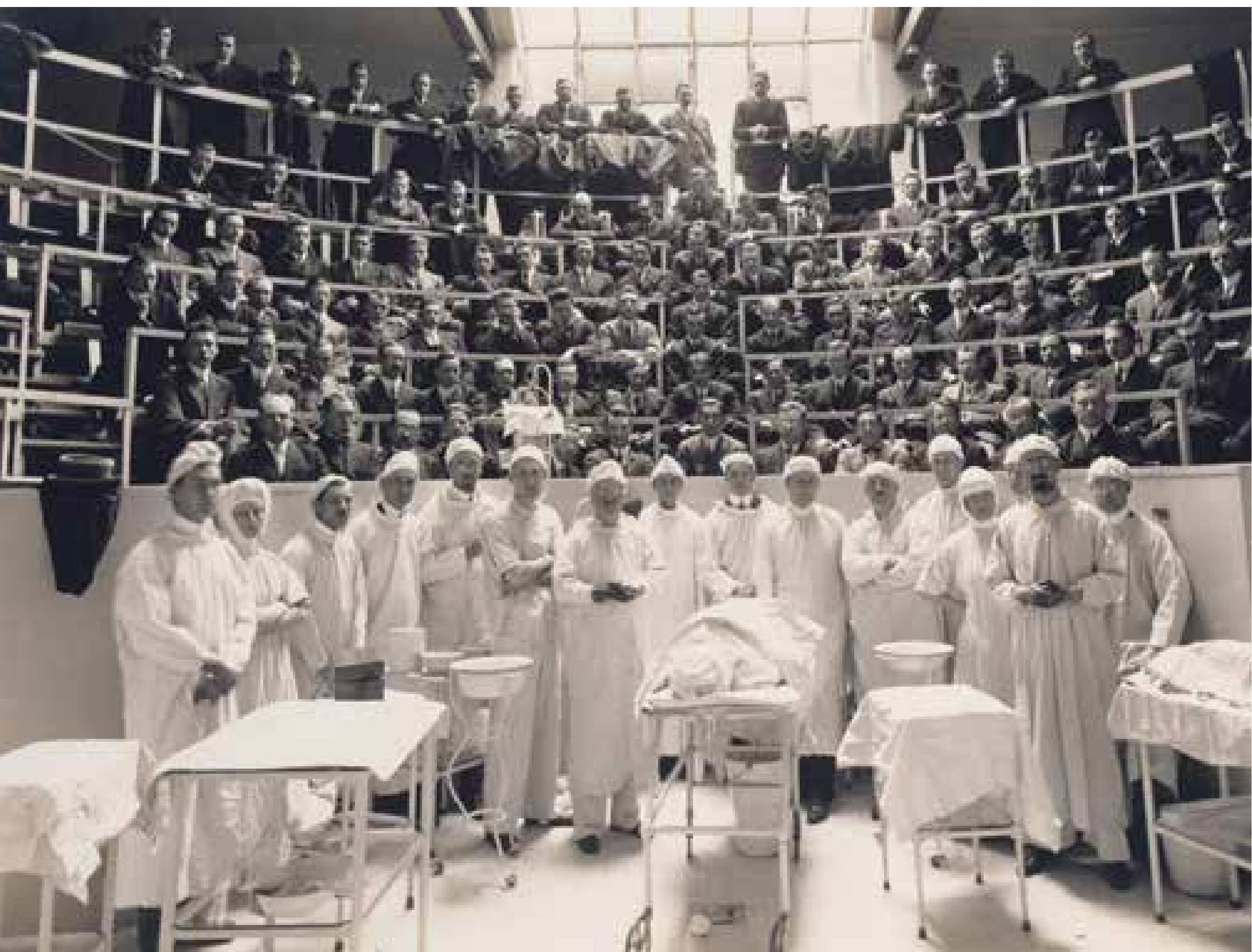
"All wrong?" queried the bishop.

"Take a case like that young fellow Denis. What is a child of his age doing at a university? No. If I had a son—but I am boring you."

"I have not been bored since I was twenty."

"I wish I could say the same of myself. I grow more intolerant of fools as the years roll on. If I had a son, I was saying, I would take him from school at the age of fourteen, not a moment later, and put him for two years in a commercial house. Wake him up; make an English citizen of him. Teach him how to deal with men as men, to write a straightforward business letter, manage his own money, and gain some respect for those industrial movements which control the world. Next, two years in some wilder part of the world, where his own countrymen and equals by birth are settled under primitive conditions and have formed their rough codes of society. The intercourse with such people would be a capital invested

Medical school class and staff with cadaver, c. 1900.



for life. The next two years should be spent in the great towns of Europe, in order to remove awkwardness of manner, prejudices of race and feeling, and to get the outward forms of a European citizen. All this would sharpen his wits, give him more interests in life, more keys to knowledge. It would widen his horizon. Then, and not a minute sooner, to the university, where he would go not as a child but as a man capable of enjoying its real advantages, attend lectures with profit, acquire manners instead of mannerisms and a university tone instead of a university taint. What do you think?"

"It sounds a trifle revolutionary," commented the bishop, with a smile. "But it appeals to me. Education is a matter that lies very near my heart. In fact, I had some thoughts of retiring from the church and devoting myself to it. I feel, I don't know why, as if I could do more in that direction."

Keith merely observed, "That is interesting. Perhaps you have reached the end of the church."

He liked this young colonial bishop and his straightforward, earnest face. Being of a complicated nature himself, he was always drawn toward men of single aims and purposes.

The other would have been pleased to know why Keith found it "interesting" and what he meant by that other phrase, but forbore to inquire. He was rather a silent man, though not deficient in mother wit. He lit a cigarette and waited.

"Let us discourse of education!" said his host with that elaborate manner which the bishop afterward discovered to be peculiar to him. "I think we need not differentiate between the sexes. In proportion as more careers are opened to women, their teaching will tend to converge with that of men. That specifically female education in domestic arts has been rendered superfluous by commercial products. I will tell you what I think. A sound schooling should teach manner of thought rather than matter. It should have a dual aim—to equip a man for hours of work and for hours of leisure. They interact; if the leisure is misspent, the work will suffer. As regards the first, we cannot expect a school to purvey more than a grip of general principles. Even that is seldom given. The second should enable a man to extract as much happiness as possible out of his spare time. The secret of happiness is curiosity. Now curiosity is not only not roused; it is repressed. You will say there is not time for everything. But how much time is wasted! Mathematics…A medieval halo clings around this subject which, as a training for the mind, has no more value than whist playing. I wonder how many excellent public servants have been lost to England because, however accomplished, they lacked the mathematical twist required to pass the standard in this one subject? As a training in intelligence, it is harmful: it teaches a person to underestimate the value of evidence based on their other modes of ratiocination. It is the poorest form of mental exercise—sheer verification; conjecture and observation are ruled out. A study of Chinese grammar would be far more valuable from the point of view of general education. All mathematics above the standard of the office boy should be a special subject, like dynamics or hydrostatics. They are useless to the ordinary man. If you mention the utility of a mathematician like Isaac Newton, don't forget that it was his preeminently antimathematical gift for drawing conclusions from analogy which made him what he was. And Euclid—that frowsy anachronism! One might as well teach Latin by the system of Donatus. Surely all knowledge is valueless, save as a guide to conduct? A guide ought to be up-to-date and convenient to handle. Euclid is a museum specimen. Half the time wasted over these subjects should be devoted to draftsmanship and object lessons. I don't know why we disparage object lessons; they were recommended by people like Bacon, Amos Comenius,

> *Training is everything. The peach was once a bitter almond; cauliflower is nothing but cabbage with a college education.*
>
> *—Mark Twain, 1893*



The Ass at School (detail), by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 1556.

and Pestalozzi. They are far superior to mathematics as a means of developing the reasoning powers; they can be made as complex as you please; they discipline the eye and mind, teach a child to discriminate between the accidental and the essential, and demand lucidity of thought and expression. And the hours spent over history! What on earth does it matter who Henry XII's wife was? Chemistry! All this, relatively speaking, is unprofitable stuff. How much better to teach the elements of sociology and jurisprudence. The laws that regulate human intercourse: What could be more interesting? And physiology—the laws that regulate our bodies: What more important? Our disrespect for the human frame is another relic of monasticism. In fact, our whole education is tainted with the monkish spirit. Divinity! Has any purpose ever been served—"

Mr. Keith sighed.

"I wish I had not eaten so many of those prawns," he added. "What are you thinking?"

"I think modern education overemphasizes the intellect. I suppose that comes from the scientific trend of the times. You cannot obtain a useful citizen if you develop only his intellect."

Norman Douglas, *from* South Wind. *After publishing several collections of travel writing on Italy and Tunisia, including* Siren Land *and* Fountains in the Sand, *Douglas completed this novel, his first, in 1917 while living on Capri, having fled London after an arrest for gross indecency with a teenage boy. Douglas died in February 1952. Two months later his onetime friend Frieda Lawrence wrote in a letter to the screenwriter Dudley Nichols, "You wouldn't have liked Douglas. He was, I think, the only wicked man I have known, in a medieval sense, but oh, so witty."*

c. 1983: Sheffield

POP QUIZ

Scripps: Test me.

Dakin: What on?

Scripps: T.S. Eliot.

"A painter of the Umbrian School
Designed upon a gesso ground
The nimbus of the Baptized God.
The wilderness is cracked and browned
But through the water pale and thin
Still shine the unoffending feet
And there above the painter set
The Father and the Paraclete."

Dakin: This is the one about the painting in the National Gallery.

Scripps: Yes.

Dakin: Don't tell me.
Piero della Francesca.
Actually, you know what?
We are *fucking* clever.

Scripps: [*laughs*] Do you know how to seem cleverer still? Don't say Piero della Francesca. Just say Piero.

Dakin: Yes?

Scripps: Apparently.

Dakin: Like Elvis.

Scripps: You've got it.

Dakin: The more you read, though, the more you see that literature is actually about losers.

Scripps: No.

Dakin: It's consolation. All literature is consolation.

Scripps: No, it isn't. What about when it's celebration? Joy?

Dakin: But it's written when the joy is over. Finished. So even when it's joy, it's grief. It's consolation.

That's why it gets written down.

I tell you, whatever Hector says, I find literature really lowering.

Scripps: Do you really believe this?

Dakin: Yes.

Scripps: You're not just doing a line of stuff for the exam? Original thoughts?

Dakin: No.

Scripps: Because it's the kind of angle Irwin would come up with.

Dakin: Well, it's true he was the one who made me realize you were allowed to think like this. He sanctioned it. I didn't know you were allowed to call art and literature into question.

Scripps: Think the unthinkable. Who's going to stop you? Only don't mention it to Hector.

Dakin: No.

Scripps: But if you reckon literature's consolation, you should try religion.

Dakin: Actually, it isn't wholly my idea.

Scripps: No?

Dakin: I've been reading this book by Kneeshaw.

Scripps: Who?

Dakin: [*shows him book*] Kneeshaw. He's a philosopher. Frederick Kneeshaw.

Scripps: I think that's pronounced Nietzsche.

Dakin: Shit. Shit. Shit.

Scripps: What's the matter?

Dakin: I talked to Irwin about it. He didn't correct me. He let me call him Kneeshaw. He'll think I'm a right fool. Shit.

Alan Bennett, *from* The History Boys. *The son of a Leeds butcher, Bennett won a scholarship to attend the University of Oxford, where he studied medieval history and, after graduating in 1957, briefly worked as a lecturer while acting in an Oxford comedy troupe. Following the success of the satirical revue* Beyond the Fringe, *he left academia in 1962 to become a playwright. This play, which follows eight students and two rival teachers at a Yorkshire boys' school, premiered at London's National Theatre in 2004; Bennett also adapted it for the 2006 film version.*

c. 1950: Senegal

WHO KNOWS?

"Why should they wish me to know?" the teacher was thinking. "They know better than I do what it is that they want. At bottom—"

He interrupted himself to scratch energetically at his side. Raising the fold of his boubou, he saw a fat brown bug running over his skin. He picked it up, delicately, and set it on the ground, then he went back to his bed.

"At bottom, they have already chosen. They are like a woman who consents to intercourse: the child that is not yet conceived is calling to her; it must be that the child shall be born. This country awaits a child. But in order that the child may be born, the country must give itself…And that—that…But also, in the long run, would dire poverty not fill our hearts with bitterness? Dire poverty is the enemy of God…"

> *Education is an admirable thing, but it is well to remember from time to time that nothing that is worth knowing can be taught.*
>
> *—Oscar Wilde, 1890*

The teacher's whole right side was hurting him. He turned over on his back.

Nothing in the teacher's house, this day, had risen toward heaven—neither the flame of the hearth nor the echo of young voices. The teacher had reduced his prayers to the strict minimum. He who used to sleep little because he was always praying had remained in bed since morning, and his body, unaccustomed to such soft treatment, was fatigued by this repose.

Upon this silent house, however, was concentrated the thought of the entire country of the Diallobé: upon this house and the unquiet form that it held in its bosom, like the almond enclosed in its shell.

The teacher could have said yes—that was easy—and the country would have exploded with joy. It would have been easy for him to say no, and the country would have obeyed him. He was saying nothing. The men of the Diallobé sensed the drama that was going on within him and thought of their teacher both gratefully and with compassion.

"My God," he prayed. "Thou hast willed that Thy creatures should live on the solid shell of appearance. Truth would drown them. But, Lord of truth, Thou knowest that appearance proliferates and hardens. Lord, preserve us from exile behind appearance."

It was on the evening before that the delegation had come. They were led by Ardo Diallobé, first son of the country. Also to be noticed among them were Dialtobé, the master of the fishermen; Farba, the teacher of the griots; the chief of the guild of smiths; that of the guild of shoemakers; and many besides. The teacher's house had been filled to overflowing.

"Master," Ardo Diallobé had told him, "the country will do what you say."

"I will say nothing," the teacher had replied, "because I know nothing. I am only the humble guide for your children, and not at all for you, my brothers."

A silence had followed this, and then the first son of the Diallobé had taken up the plea again:

"The Word, certainly, can suspend itself like a garment, master. Life does not suspend itself. The time has come for our country to reach a decision. The chief of the Diallobé has said to us, 'I am the hand which acts. It is you, people of the Diallobé, who are the body and the brain. Speak, and I shall act.' What shall we say?"

The teacher, then, had stood up.

"I swear upon the Word that I do not know. What a man really knows is for him like the succession of numbers: he can say it over indefinitely, and take it in all senses, going on without limits. What I could say to you, on the contrary, is short and plain: 'Act,' or, again, 'Do not act.' Nothing more. Do you not see for yourselves how easily that can be said, and how there is no more reason to say *this* than *that*?"

The teacher had spoken with vehemence, and he was looking at all of them at the same time, as if to communicate to each of them the

conviction that he knew nothing. But they had remained gloomy. Perhaps the teacher had spoken in words that were too lofty. As he returned to the subject now, he was seeking to explain himself in another way:

"People of the Diallobé, I know what you are waiting for. You do not know what you ought to do. And so you have thought, Let us go to see the teacher of our children, so that he may tell us what we ought to do…Isn't that it?"

"Exactly," the first son of the Diallobé agreed.

"You are waiting for me to indicate to you what you ought to do, as ten indicates the following eleven to the man who can count. Isn't that so?" the teacher went on.

There was a murmur of acquiescence.

"People of the Diallobé, I swear to you that I have no such knowledge as that. As much as yourselves, I should like to know…"

The men who were gathered there looked at one another in deep uncertainty and dismay. If the teacher did not know, then who would know? The country must reach a decision nevertheless. Travelers coming from distant provinces were reporting that men everywhere had chosen to send their children to the foreign school. These new generations were going to learn how to build dwelling houses, how to care for the bodies within those dwelling houses, as the foreigners knew how to do.

The teacher did not notice when his guests left him. Having spoken, he had become lost in his thoughts once more.

Cheikh Hamidou Kane, *from* Ambiguous Adventure. *Kane attended a traditional Quranic school until the age of ten, when he switched to a French school. He went on to study law and philosophy in Paris before returning to Senegal to work for the government. In this novel, the people of the Diallobé must decide if they will send their children to the colonial school, giving way to the French. Kane said in an interview with Maryse Condé that the protagonist, Samba Diallo, "is more representative of a whole group and a whole generation than of my own personal story."*

Student and teacher, detail of an Attic red-figure cup attributed to the Eretria Painter, c. 440 BC.



c. 1939: Harlem

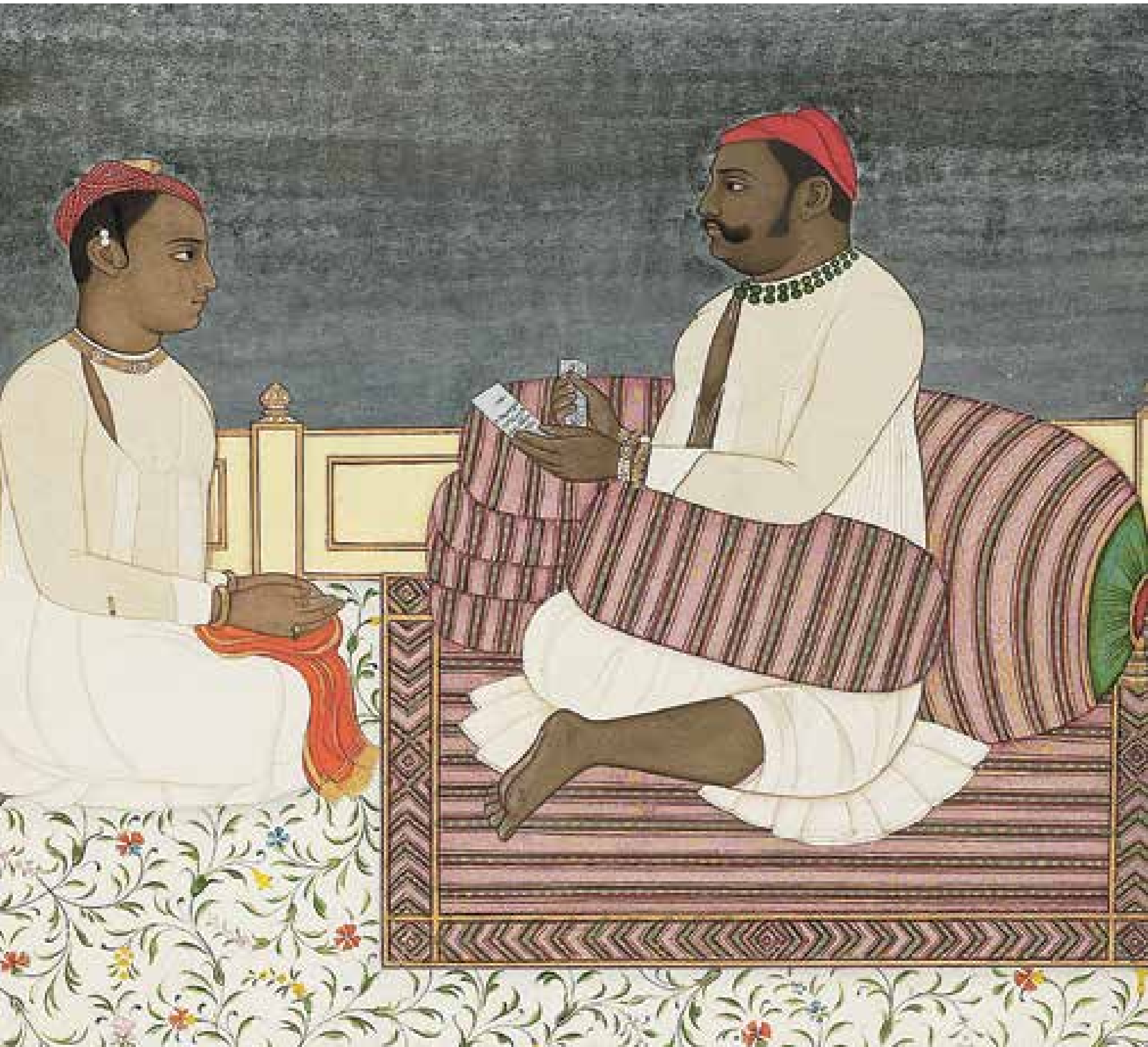
FINAL EXAM

My first-grade teacher was named Sister Mary of Perpetual Help, and she was a disciplinarian of the first order, right after my mother's own heart. A week after I started school, she sent a note home to my mother asking her not to dress me in so many layers of clothing, because then I couldn't feel the strap on my behind when I was punished.

Sister Mary of Perpetual Help ran the first grade with an iron hand in the shape of a cross. She couldn't have been more than eighteen. She was big, and blond, I think, since we never got to see the nuns' hair in those days. But her eyebrows were blond, and she was supposed to be totally dedicated, like all the other Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, to caring for the colored and Indian children of America. Caring for was not always caring about. And it always felt like Sister MPH hated either teaching or little children.

She had divided up the class into two groups, the Fairies and the Brownies. In this day of heightened sensitivity to racism and color usage, I don't have to tell you which were

Man seated on a terrace with an attendant or pupil, India, nineteenth century.



the good students and which were the baddies. I always wound up in the Brownies, because either I talked too much or I broke my glasses or I perpetrated some other awful infraction of the endless rules of good behavior.

But two glorious times that year, I made it into the Fairies for brief periods of time. One was put into the Brownies if one misbehaved or couldn't learn to read. I had learned to read already, but I couldn't tell my numbers. Whenever Sister MPH would call a few of us up to the front of the room for our reading lesson, she would say, "All right, children, now turn to page six in your readers," or, "Turn to page nineteen, please, and begin at the top of the page."

Well, I didn't know what page to turn to, and I was ashamed of not being able to read my numbers, so when my turn came to read, I couldn't, because I didn't have the right place. After the prompting of a few words, she would go on to the next reader, and soon I wound up in the Brownies.

This was around the second month of school, in October. My new seatmate was Alvin, and he was the worst boy in the whole class. His clothes were dirty, and he smelled unwashed, and rumor had it he had once called Sister MPH a bad name, but that couldn't have been possible because he would have been suspended permanently from school.

Alvin used to browbeat me into lending him my pencil to draw endless pictures of airplanes dropping huge penile bombs. He would always promise to give me the pictures when he was finished. But of course, whenever he was finished, he would decide that the picture was too good for a girl, so he would have to keep it and make me another. Yet I never stopped hoping for one of them, because he drew airplanes very well.

He also would scratch his head and shake out the dandruff onto our joint spelling book or reader and then tell me the flakes of dandruff were dead lice. I believed him in this, also, and was constantly terrified of catching cooties. But Alvin and I worked out our own

1650: London

LIBRARY BARD

I have thought that if the proper employments of library keepers were taken into consideration, they would be of exceeding great use to all sorts of scholars and have a universal influence upon all the parts of learning, to produce and propagate the same unto perfection. For if library keepers did understand themselves in the nature of their work and would make themselves, as they ought to be, useful in their places in a public way, they ought to become agents for the advancement of universal learning; and to this effect I could wish that their places might not be made, as everywhere they are, mercenary but rather honorary.

The proper charge, then, of the honorary library keeper in a university should be thought upon, and the end of that employment, in my conception, is to keep the public stock of learning, which is in books and manuscripts to increase it, and to propose it to others in the way which may be most useful unto all. His work, then, is to be a factor and trader for helps to learning, and a treasurer to keep them, and a dispenser to apply them to use, or to see them well used, or at least not abused.

With those that are within the university, the library keeper should have acquaintance to know all that are of any parts, and how their vein of learning doth lie, to supply helps unto them in their faculties from without and from within the nation, to put them upon the keeping of correspondence with men of their own strain, for the beating out of matters not yet elaborated in sciences, so that they may be as his assistants and subordinate factors in his trade and in their own for gaining of knowledge.

John Dury, *from* The Reformed Librarie-Keeper. *Born in Edinburgh in 1596, Dury studied theology in Leiden and was chaplain and tutor to the children of Charles I. After the king's execution in 1649, Dury urged English citizens to pledge loyalty to the new republican government. The next year he published this treatise on library management and was appointed deputy keeper of the former royal library at St. James's Palace. He served in the post until Charles II was restored to the throne, leaving England in 1661 and spending the remainder of his life in exile.*

system together for reading. He couldn't read, but he knew all his numbers, and I could read words, but I couldn't find the right page. Alvin would show me the right pages to turn to when Sister called them out, and I would whisper the right words to him whenever it came his turn to read. Inside of a week after we devised this scheme of things, we had gotten out of the Brownies together. Since we shared a reader, we always went up together to read with the Fairies, so we had a really good thing going there for a while.

But Alvin began to get sick around Thanksgiving and was absent a lot, and he didn't come back to school at all after Christmas. I used to miss his dive-bomber pictures, but most of all I missed his page numbers. After a few times of being called up by myself and not being able to read, I landed back in the Brownies again.

I wonder how many parents realize that by the so-called education they are giving their children they are only driving them into the commonplace, and depriving them of any chance of doing anything beautiful or original.

—Isadora Duncan, 1927

Years later I found out that Alvin had died of tuberculosis over Christmas, and that was why we all had been x-rayed in the auditorium after Mass on the first day back to school from Christmas vacation.

I spent a few more weeks in the Brownies with my mouth almost shut during reading lesson, unless the day's story fell on page eight, or ten, or twenty, which were the three numbers I knew.

Then over one weekend, we had our first writing assignment. We were to look in our parents' newspaper and cut out words we knew the meaning of and make them into simple sentences. We could only use one *the*. It felt like an easy task, since I was already reading the comics by this time.

On Sunday morning after church, when I usually did my homework, I noticed an ad for White Rose Salada Tea on the back of the *New York Times Magazine* that my father was reading at the time. It had the most gorgeous white rose on a red background, and I decided I must have that rose for my picture—our sentences were to be illustrated. I searched through the paper until I found an *I*, and then a *like*, which I dutifully clipped out along with my rose, and the words *White*, *Rose*, *Salada*, and *Tea*. I knew the brand name well because it was my mother's favorite tea.

On Monday morning we all stood our sentence papers up on the chalk channels, leaning them against the blackboards. And there among the twenty-odd "The boy ran" and "It was cold" was "I like White Rose Salada Tea" and my beautiful white rose on a red background.

That was too much coming from a Brownie. Sister Mary of PH frowned.

"This was to be our own work, children," she said. "Who helped you with your sentence, Audre?" I told her I had done it alone.

"Our guardian angels weep when we don't tell the truth, Audre. I want a note from your mother tomorrow telling me that you are sorry for lying to the baby Jesus."

I told the story at home, and the next day I brought a note from my father saying that the sentence had indeed been my own work. Triumphantly, I gathered up my books and moved back over to the Fairies.

The thing that I remember best about being in the first grade was how uncomfortable it was, always having to leave room for my guardian angel on those tiny seats, and moving back and forth across the room from Brownies to Fairies and back again.

This time I stayed in the Fairies for a long time, because I finally started to recognize my numbers. I stayed there until the day I broke my glasses. I had taken them off to clean them in the bathroom, and they slipped out of my hand. I was never to do that, and so I was in disgrace.

Since I could not see at all to do any work from the blackboard, Sister Mary of PH made me sit in the back of the room on the window



Boy in Labyrinth, by Donjon Isabelle Tower, 2021.

seat with a dunce cap on. She had the rest of the class offer up a prayer for my poor mother, who had such a naughty girl who broke her glasses and caused her parents such needless extra expense to replace them. She also had them offer up a special prayer for me to stop being such a wicked-hearted child.

I amused myself by counting the rainbows of color that danced like a halo around the lamp on Sister Mary of PH's desk, watching the starburst patterns of light that the incandescent light bulb became without my glasses. But I missed them, and not being able to see. I never once gave a thought to the days when I believed that bulbs were starburst patterns of color, because that was what all light looked like to me.

It must have been close to summer by this time. As I sat with the dunce cap on, I can remember the sun pouring through the classroom window hot upon my back, as the rest of the class dutifully intoned their Hail Marys for my soul, and I played secret games with the distorted rainbows of light, until Sister noticed and made me stop blinking my eyes so fast.

Audre Lorde, *from* Zami: A New Spelling of My Name. *Born in Harlem in 1934, Lorde worked as a factory worker, social worker, medical technician, and librarian before finding acclaim as a poet. She told an interviewer in 1983 that* Zami *contained "not only my stories but the stories of many black women, black West Indian women raising children," and that the book was written because "there was a big empty space where these stories should be." Lorde was named the poet laureate of New York State in 1991, a year before her death at the age of fifty-eight.*



A MEANS TO AN END

by Michael D. Hattem

In 1788, as the young republic was trying to establish itself under the new Constitution, Noah Webster wrote, "Americans, unshackle your minds, and act like independent beings…you have an empire to raise…and a national character to establish." "To effect these great objects," he continued, "it is necessary to frame a liberal plan of policy and build it on a broad system of education." After the War of Independence ended, Webster published several best-selling readers and grammatical texts "calculated particularly for American schools." These books incorporated many now-familiar stories from the United States' colonial and revolutionary past, chosen for their "noble, just, and independent sentiments of liberty and patriotism" with the hope that education might "transfuse them into the breasts of the rising generation." From the very beginnings of the United States, education, history, and patriotism have been fundamentally intertwined.

Education in the United States underwent its first great expansion in the decades between the Revolution and the Civil War. The revolutionary generation had few models of public education. Until then, education had been limited almost entirely to elite white males, who were instructed in Latin and Greek (required for admission to college) at young ages in grammar schools. The colonies' few colleges were primarily seminaries aimed at preparing young men for the ministry. Only in New England, which enjoyed especially high literacy rates, did anything resembling public education exist, in the long-standing tradition of town schools, the one- or two-room schoolhouses serving rural areas. These schools offered the classical form of education predominant in

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Age Teaching Youth, by William Blake, c. 1790.

the colonies, focusing on grammar, logic, and rhetoric. Though history was not yet a distinct subject taught in schools, it was nevertheless seen as important. Young men were expected to read history on their own time as a form of instruction for serving in political office and civic life. The 1728 book *A New Method of Studying History, Geography, and Chronology*, Richard Rawlinson's translation of Nicolas Lenglet du Fresnoy's 1713 French work, instructed:

> Everyone knowing the state of life he is placed in ought to regulate himself in the study of History…We know for certain that it would be very dangerous for a private person, in applying himself to the reading of Historians, to turn his head to political reflexions, and those means made use of to make an appearance, and advance himself in the courts of great men.

In other words, knowledge of history was understood to be powerful enough that it could allow an ordinary person to overcome the period's rigid social hierarchy and pass himself off as an elite gentleman.

In 1779, before the War of Independence was over, Thomas Jefferson proposed a Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge, which would fund three years of schooling for all free children, both boys and girls, in Virginia. Nationalist boosters like Webster, who called an educated citizenry "the sine qua non of the existence of the American republics," also called for the creation of a system of public education. Though these efforts largely failed, states did lend their support to the establishment of private academies that again primarily educated elites. State support for these schools, such as Phillips Academy Andover, Phillips Exeter Academy, and Deerfield Academy, included the granting of charters and incorporation. In Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia, sixty academies were established between the end of the American Revolution and 1800, and almost all of them received such support from their respective states.

Female education took on its own specific importance because women were expected to provide the civic education at home that would produce virtuous, patriotic republican citizens. As Benjamin Rush wrote in 1787, "Ladies should be qualified to a certain degree, by a peculiar and suitable education, to concur in instructing their sons in the principles of liberty and government." In the following decades, women's academies opened to provide the education necessary to achieve this ideal of "republican motherhood." Women's new roles as civic educators proved to be short-lived, however, as Victorian notions of femininity redefined gender roles in the nineteenth century, leaving most married women confined to the domestic sphere. The elite male academies came under fire for their exclusivity, and the public reaction against these schools helped drive support for state-funded education systems by the middle of the nineteenth century.

Modern conceptions of patriotism and its relationship to education originated in the decades between the 1880s and the 1920s. Facing an unprecedented influx of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe, upper- and middle-class Americans feared that the growing presence of foreigners—particularly those inclined toward socialism—would dilute the appreciation of the ideals of "Americanism" and patriotism among the native-born population. New conservative organizations promoting hereditary patriotism, such as the Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution, were founded across the country. These groups took it upon themselves to educate newcomers on what it meant to be a patriotic American, including holding a reverent view of the country's past and an appreciation of law and order and the status quo. They formed committees to promote "patriotic citizenship" for immigrants by establishing educational programs in cities and towns across the country, offering lectures and evening classes to introduce immigrants to the nation's history, laws, and government. These groups' celebratory approach to the past drew on earlier



Landscape with the Education of Bacchus, by Francesco Zuccarelli, 1744.

forms of patriotism, but they applied them in new ways, based on the political and educational circumstances of a new century.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, ideas about education, history, and patriotism were changing in fundamental ways. All states now required compulsory education; in the nineteenth century, fewer Americans had gone to school and for a shorter period of time. New ideas about education were leading to a more student-centered approach to teaching. Progressive teachers sought to engage students through early forms of what would later be called "inquiry-based learning." The traditional top-down style of teaching—in which students acted solely as the receivers of knowledge dictated from on high—was ideally suited in many ways to instilling an unquestioning patriotism in students. By contrast, the newer methods were intended to provide training for citizenship by allowing students to develop their critical-thinking skills through interpreting texts and discussing large questions of civic importance. As a result, progressive education directly challenged the older form of patriotic education in both method and content. As education began changing significantly, parents sought to exert a greater influence over what went on in schools. They ran for seats on the growing number of local boards of education and founded parent-teacher associations, which had first formed in the 1890s. With education changing and more Americans participating in the educational system, the stakes of education-related decisions were raised accordingly.

In the final decades of the nineteenth century, the United States' first doctoral programs in history introduced the German concepts of academic history and the academic historian. Before then, the writing of history had been limited largely to elite males with the personal resources and leisure time to research and write—the same class that had been favored with education before its expansion. By the early twentieth century, a new generation of academic historians had emerged who researched the American past by looking at primary sources. They wrote with a commitment to uncovering the truth, unlike nineteenth-century historians of the United States, whose work was openly nationalistic and triumphal. From this generation came the imperial historians and the progressive historians. The imperial historians were conservative Anglophiles who challenged the good-vs.-evil narrative of America's founding by studying Britain's administration of the colonies before the American Revolution. They concluded that the colonists had been treated fairly by Britain and had little cause to declare independence. Meanwhile, the progressive historians focused on the importance of class conflict in American history. Their exemplar, Charles A. Beard, famously argued in 1913 that the founders at the Constitutional Convention voted according to their personal economic interests. Though this view later fell out of favor, his claim shocked many at the time because it reduced the deified founders to crass politicians and treated the Convention as a counterrevolution.

The politics of the early twentieth century also deeply influenced changing ideas about patriotism. By the 1920s, the Republican Party was no longer exclusively Northern, and the Democratic Party no longer had a monopoly on the South. The formerly progressive Republicans became conservative champions of business interests, while the formerly conservative Democratic Party began to include populists and disillusioned progressives fleeing the

A parade of the Komsomol, a Communist youth organization, Moscow, c. 1930.



Republican Party. Conservatives of both parties carried on the nineteenth-century tradition of defining patriotism by celebrating and mythologizing the past, especially the nation's revolutionary origins. The Constitution was increasingly seen by conservatives as a product of what Warren G. Harding called "the divine inspiration of the founding fathers." This passive form of patriotism, as historian Ben Railton describes it, placed a specific vision of the past beyond debate and turned it into a test of loyalty for citizens and new immigrants alike. Americans who did not declare their unconditional affection for the so-called founding fathers and acknowledge the unchanging perfection of the Constitution were considered suspect.

Progressives developed a more mutable, Darwinian understanding of society. While campaigning for president in 1912, Woodrow Wilson argued that "a nation is a living thing" and that the Constitution should be treated as a living, evolving document. In other words, progressives acknowledged that changing political and economic circumstances necessitated changes to institutions—and even to the Constitution itself, through amendments. This critical approach to the nation's history—which saw the Constitution and the law as tools to achieve the revolutionary ideals of liberty and equality enshrined in the Declaration of Independence and later advanced in the Gettysburg Address—produced a more active form of patriotism, defined by a commitment to progress. The dynamic between conservatives' celebratory patriotism and liberal progressives' activist criticism helped lay a foundation for the many conflicts over education, history, and patriotism that followed.

The first national conflict over textbooks began in New York City in 1920. The United States had strengthened its alliance with Great Britain around the turn of the century, and sedition laws were passed during World War I to keep Americans from publicly disparaging their ally. After the war ended, controversy erupted over the depiction in school materials of Britain and its treatment of the colonies. The work of academic historians had made its way into school textbooks over the previous two decades. Charles Grant Miller, a conservative columnist and the founder of the Patriot League for the Preservation of American History, wrote a series of letters to conservative newspapers in which he raised alarms about the new textbooks being used in New York City schools. Miller condemned the books for promulgating both the imperial historians' "new and apologetic attitude toward England" and the progressive historians' more critical views of the founders. Conservative patriotic groups joined him in denouncing these ideas as a "defamation of America." Drawing on a long-standing proclivity toward conspiracy in American political culture, some conservatives saw these "Anglicized school histories" as part of a "sinister movement" to "bring America once more into the British Empire." Worried that "the springs of our patriotic inspirations are being poisoned," he warned that "what is taught to our children determines our nation's destiny."

> *An educated man should know something about everything and everything about something.*
> *—C.V. Wedgwood, 1963*

By 1921 the controversy had led the conservative New York City Board of Education to create a commission to investigate pro-British influences on textbooks. The committee's report, published the following year, included a long list of proposed revisions for ten textbooks taught in the city's schools. Education, the report stated, was a "means to ends; such as love for law and order; respect for constituted authority; appreciation of the institutions of the country and its ideals." News of the controversy in New York sparked complaints about unpatriotic textbooks throughout the country. Before long, committees in several cities and towns opened their own investigations into textbooks, urged on by local politicians, some of which went on to pass laws restricting the teaching of "unpatriotic" history. In 1923 the Wisconsin state legislature passed a law that began:

> No history or other textbook shall be adopted for use or be in any district school, city school, vocational school, or high school which falsifies the facts regarding the War of Independence or the War of 1812 or which defames our nation's founders or misrepresents the ideals and cause for which they struggled and sacrificed, or which contains propaganda favorable to any foreign government.

In *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1923, the historian James Truslow Adams criticized "the constant and bitter dwelling…upon the fact that the recent historians are no longer influenced by hatred of England or by ancestor-worship." Instead, wrote Adams, they now tried to "mete out justice to both branches of the English-speaking peoples" and "to see our ancestors as they were and not as demigods." Oregon nonetheless passed a law similar to Wisconsin's, and for the rest of the decade textbook investigations driven by local politics occurred across the country, including in Chicago; Boston; Newark, New Jersey; St. Louis; and Washington, DC.

> *There is an enormous difference between knowledge and education.*
>
> *—John Ruskin, 1853*

The fight over textbooks in the 1920s shows that when new ideas and practices of education, history, and patriotism clashed, they raised a host of seemingly perennial issues and questions. What is the primary purpose of education? Who should control history? What kind of history would best inspire patriotism? The long American strains of anti-intellectualism and elitism made academic historians immediately suspect; they were depicted as aloof, conceited, and isolated from the real world. Moreover, their work seemed to be antithetical to what many adults had learned in school. Simple, good-vs.-evil narratives of national origins were effective at promoting the conservative form of celebratory patriotism, while the more complex picture of the past uncovered by academic historians seemed to lend itself to a liberal form of critical patriotism. As a result, debates over these questions were from the start driven primarily by political ideology, even if many conservatives disliked the ideas of personally conservative imperial historians just as much as those of liberal progressive historians.

These two opposing approaches to patriotism and the controversies they created reflected earlier tensions and conflicts in American intellectual life between reason and passion. Twentieth-century conservative approaches to both history and patriotism were fundamentally rooted in emotion. For conservatives, patriotism was, first and foremost, a feeling. That feeling, with its religious overtones, could trace its origins back to Puritan New England, the first and second evangelical Great Awakenings, and the triumph of romanticism over the Enlightenment in the nineteenth century. It held that patriotism needed to be spread, and schools were places where it, like religion, could be instilled in children from a young age, thereby making them less likely to question it after reaching maturity. The nation's history served as an origin story that formed a basis for that patriotism. Worshipping at the altar of the founding fathers, near-mythological heroes of a previous age, suited religious sensibilities and amplified the power of that history. To challenge that history, then, was to challenge many people's sense of civic meaning and national purpose.

Yet academic historians believed their practice of history was close to a scientific discipline. Many of its earliest practitioners believed that if one could only uncover enough facts about the past, what had happened and what it meant would become objectively clear. Though this type of positivist thinking was already in decline by the early twentieth century, many academic historians retained some of the confidence that came with it. By engaging in deep research into primary sources and approaching them with objectivity, they had developed new methods for

learning about the past that they were convinced were superior to those used by the romantic nationalist historians of the nineteenth century. However much they might have relished toppling the old nationalist histories, many of the nation's most prominent progressive historians became enthusiastically patriotic during World War I and World War II.

Education in the early years of the new nation was intensely patriotic. After all, many of its earliest proponents believed patriotic education was one of the best means for achieving national unity among a relatively diverse population. It was intended to help bridge the differences, conflicts, and animosities that remained between people of different states and regions. In the late nineteenth century, education was again seen as a useful tool in healing lingering animosities between North and South, and its patriotic mission was renewed. When immigration to the United States increased dramatically around the start of the twentieth century, conservatives in particular turned to education to help assimilate the growing immigrant population and thereby inoculate native-born Americans from infection by radical European ideas about socialism. When a new, student-centered approach to education emerged and academic history displaced the older, openly nationalist histories, it complicated the long-standing symbiotic relationship among education, history, and patriotism.

Patriotism is, in many ways, an expression of an understanding about the relationship between past and present. Since the early twentieth century, conservative celebratory patriotism has been defined by a triumphal understanding of history. That triumphalism helped give rise to and reinforce post–World War II notions of American exceptionalism, and the Cold War helped push patriotism in the United States closer to chauvinistic nationalism. Embedded in that understanding of patriotism is a sense that the past is unchanging and primarily a source of positive lessons to be learned. It represents a deep commitment to the status quo. After all, to celebrate the past is to celebrate the present it created; to question the present is to question the past that created it. To celebrate the past in such a way is inherently conservative. It is also based on an older teleological understanding of history in which the past was always inevitably moving toward the present, leaving little room for contingency. Liberal critical patriotism holds that contingency should be seized as an opportunity for change, and the past is something that the present can improve upon. It rejects any type of overarching triumphalism. In a sense, it understands the past as a call to action. The practice of academic history implicitly treated history as constantly subject to revision. It created a fissure in American culture over the proper relationships between past and present, between the nation and its history, and between those committed to the practice of history as an ongoing excavation of the past and those determined to use history in explicitly patriotic education.

> *For in much wisdom is much grief: and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.*
>
> —*Ecclesiastes, c. 250* BC

Such different ways of thinking about the past and the present have continually collided in the realm of education because they are ultimately interrelated. Education is perhaps the primary way in which a society perpetuates its history and instills its values in a rising generation. Both education at large and the specific narratives of U.S. history that are taught are oriented toward the future. If it is axiomatic that those who control the past control the future, then, to a significant extent, those who control education control the future because they define how history is taught and what it should mean to citizens. Education, whether state-sponsored or not, is always intended to reproduce a specific kind of society and civic identity. It therefore has often found itself a fulcrum in conflicts over the proper use of history and the proper definition of patriotism, which are, in turn, also fundamentally about shaping the future.



The Children of Martin Anton Heckscher, by Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein, 1805.

SCHOOLBOY, WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

by Moudhy Al-Rashid

In the eighteenth century BC, a preteen student in what is now southern Iraq grew so frustrated with a vocabulary exercise that he lifted a clay tablet he was writing on, brought it to his lips, and bit down. The impressions of his teeth remain in the corner of that tablet, which was unearthed almost four thousand years later in excavations of the ancient city of Nippur, part of the vast Babylonian Empire built along the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The clay these rivers deposited onto the surrounding plains would eventually form the medium for writing shared by the civilizations that called Mesopotamia home in antiquity, including the Babylonians.

Known as cuneiform because of its characteristic wedges (*cuneus* means "wedge" in Latin), this writing system preserves hundreds of thousands of snapshots of life in ancient Mesopotamia, from the diplomatic spats of

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royalty to receipts for beer, law collections to lullabies. Cuneiform tablets tell countless stories, including those of children learning the very writing system that has preserved these clay pages of history. Initially developed as a record-keeping tool near the end of the fourth millennium BC, cuneiform was first used to write the Sumerian language before being adapted in the last half of the third millennium BC to write the unrelated Akkadian language. After the fall of the last Sumerian dynasty, around 2000 BC, the political landscape of ancient Mesopotamia gave way to the Akkadian-speaking Babylonians in the south and their Assyrian neighbors to the north. Their shared intellectual heritage, confined to schools and professional scholarly networks, kept Sumerian alive long after the lifetimes of its last speakers.

"Schoolboy, where have you been going so long?" reads the first line of "Schooldays," a work of literature written in Sumerian. Dozens of fragmentary copies of this text made by students were uncovered in Nippur, and they preserve a story about a fictional boy who goes to the *eduba*, which translates loosely to "tablet house" or "school." The work tells us less about the realities of life in school and more about the types of stories included in the scribal curriculum, but it nevertheless provides some tantalizing hints of student life:

> I recited my tablet. I ate my lunch.
> I prepared, wrote, and finished my tablets.

His mother packs a lunch of "two breads" for him, and his schoolteacher recites words for him to copy onto a tablet. This mundane list of activities takes a dark turn about twenty lines in, when the student's heart is gripped by fear at the prospect of beatings for minor missteps like writing with a messy hand or speaking Sumerian badly. "I neglected the scribal art," he laments. "I forsook the scribal art." Yet his teacher goes on to praise him, calling him "exalted" and "a hero." "Schooldays" celebrates the gifts of literacy and wisdom that education imparts, and it ends with praise for Nisaba, the goddess of writing and a patron deity of scribes.

A similar Sumerian story, labeled "Eduba R" by modern scholars, features a dialogue between a teacher and a student who is challenged to recite the school's regulations. "If you were to ask me about the rules of the school," the student replies, "I would be speaking from sunrise until sunset!" This bit of banter is a far cry from the beatings of "Schooldays," and after the dialogue, the text describes the pupils gathering to recite arithmetic and vocabulary. The extant sections that follow provide glimpses of the everyday tasks of schooling, such as students flattening their clay tablets before writing on them and, eventually, wetting them for reuse.

> *It is as impossible to withhold education from the receptive mind as it is impossible to force it upon the unreasoning.*
>
> —*Agnes Repplier, 1931*

Like any literary work, "Schooldays," "Eduba R," and similar stories must have drawn some elements from reality, including the obvious fact that Babylonian students were learning the Sumerian language, by then long dead. The expansion and adaptation of cuneiform to represent Akkadian reflected a deliberate choice by the Babylonians and others to preserve the language of their predecessors. In the words of Agnete Lassen—who, as a curator of the Yale Babylonian Collection, has dedicated her career to the history and heritage of ancient Mesopotamia—"almost four thousand years ago, people were thinking about cultural preservation and actively preserving their learning for future generations."

"Schooldays" and "Eduba R" show that scribal schools stayed loyal to the Sumerian language despite the growing temporal gulf between its ancient speakers and the later students who learned these stories. But it is otherwise difficult to disentangle fiction from fact. The stories may exaggerate elements of life in the *eduba* for didactic effect or humor, and they

perhaps obscure as much as they illuminate the realities of learning how to write in clay. Even if a modern reader were to take the details in these stories at face value, they inevitably reduce education in ancient Babylonia to the experiences of a handful of archetypal students.

We need not despair at these stories' shortcomings, thanks to an unassuming house found among the ruins of Nippur. Known as House F in the mid-twentieth-century archaeological reports of excavation teams from the University of Pennsylvania and the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, this dwelling had a small courtyard bordered by three small rooms and one large back room, which might have been an additional courtyard. Nothing about this mud-brick structure stands out until you count the number of clay tablets, some whole but many broken, found within its walls. Whereas archaeologists excavated some 200 tablets and fragments from neighboring houses, House F yielded 1,425 specimens in the first field season alone. According to Eleanor Robson, a leading scholar of the history of knowledge in ancient Mesopotamia, "tablets were built into the very floors, walls, and furniture of the rooms," making the house an *eduba* in the truest sense of the word.

> *That obtained in youth may endure like characters engraved in stones.*
>
> *—Ibn Gabirol, c. 1040*

The tablets found in House F and in similar buildings throughout southern Mesopotamia have made it possible to reconstruct every stage of scribal education in eighteenth-century-BC Babylonia, from a child's first wedge to a more advanced student's copy of "Schooldays."

Some of the tablets show children's first attempts to write in cuneiform by using a reed stylus to impress a single wedge or sign over and over again into a flattened mass of wet clay. The lines might be uneven or the signs too big for the size of the tablet. Fingerprints and fingernail marks interrupt the messy impressed triangles, suggesting that some of these young students had tried to erase their work or had yet to learn how to hold the tablet without their fingers leaving as many marks as the stylus.

Practice eventually made perfect, and students moved on to basic lists of signs and words that, remarkably, reproduce or revisit the earliest texts from the dawn of writing. Writing in ancient Mesopotamia developed as an accounting tool at the end of the fourth millennium BC in Uruk. Alongside early accounting records, scribes composed thematically arranged inventories of the signs encountered in their day-to-day work in order to standardize and teach the fledgling script. There remains much for scholars to learn about these early lists, from the precise meaning of the signs to their philosophical import. What is clear is that lists became a mainstay of scribal education and scholarship until the final years of cuneiform writing, sometime in the first few centuries of the common era.

The tooth-marked tablet from Nippur preserves more than the dental records of a frustrated—or perhaps peer-pressured or peckish—child. It also preserves part of a lexical text known as Proto-Ea, which lists Sumerian signs and their pronunciation. Such lists preserved and taught the correct usage of cuneiform signs and vocabulary that students had to master long before they could move on to anything like "Schooldays." Sometimes a teacher would copy out a list on the left side of a tablet for a student to replicate on the right side, or write out an exercise on one face of a tablet for the student to copy out on the reverse. Students copied lists of gods, types of wood, containers and their contents, professions, body parts, and more in order to learn the building blocks of the writing system and the languages it was used to record. More advanced lists even exploited the many layers of meaning in cuneiform signs to teach analogical reasoning alongside vocabulary. The sign *a*, for example, represents the Sumerian word for "water," "semen," and "father," among other things. While these meanings may seem unrelated, it is possible to suggest that both water and semen are life-giving liquids, with the latter associated with



Babylonian cuneiform student exercise tablet, Mesopotamia, twentieth to sixteenth century BC.

paternity, to account for the sign's many meanings. In addition to representing a whole word, the same sign can more simply represent the sound *a* within a word spelled out syllabically.

Because the vast majority of cuneiform texts are unsigned, not much is known about the identities of the *eduba* students of the second millennium BC. Compositions like "Schooldays" tell of fictional boys reciting from tablets and avoiding beatings, but there is evidence that girls also trained to become scribes. Around the same time that House F was used as a school, an excerpt of a list much like Proto-Ea was written in clay, likely in a city about a hundred miles to the northwest called Sippar, where a community of women known as *naditu* lived at the Ebabbar temple, devoted to the worship of the sun god Shamash. The final lines of this exercise read, "The hand of Belti-reminni, female scribe," in handwriting matching that of a clay copy of the Sumerian hymn known today as "The Hymn to the Hoe," a playful and pun-filled ode to the agricultural tool that showcases the highest levels of scribal training.

School tablets found in the houses of *naditu* suggest that these women were literate and underwent training in line with that of standard scribal schools in order to serve the temple community's administrative needs. Extant sources suggest that girls undertook scribal learning in far fewer numbers than boys, and only a handful of surviving school texts from the early second

millennium BC are signed with the informative, if impersonal, "hand of a female scribe." At the same time, the patron deity of scribes was a goddess, the earliest named author was a woman named Enheduanna, and texts written by women survive from most periods of ancient Mesopotamian history.

After a student had mastered the basics of cuneiform, the next phase of education introduced more advanced lists and mathematics, which students had to learn to help them carry out practical calculations in their future roles. These occasionally took the form of word problems akin to the ones that left me mystified and stressed as an elementary school student. One text lists twenty-three word problems relating to a "little canal." To solve them, students were expected to calculate measurements of time, the dimensions of canals, and even the wages of canal excavators. Given the dimensions of a canal, students determined how many days it would take to dig it, or conversely, given the number of days a canal's excavation took, students calculated its dimensions. In other problems, they learned to calculate the areas of triangles, trapezoids, and circles, most likely the foundation for work relating to the area measurements of fields.

> *The most important part of teaching is to teach what it is to know.*
>
> *—Simone Weil, 1943*

These practical exercises preserve some breathtaking moments in the history of mathematics. One tablet shaped like a large lentil features a faint circle in its center with numbers in various positions around it. Just above the shape is the number three, which modern scholars have taken to be a nearly four-thousand-year-old approximation of pi. Another similarly shaped tablet shows an accurate calculation of the square root of two and a diagram that suggests knowledge of the Pythagorean theorem well over a millennium before its namesake Greek philosopher's birth. Although the equation as we know it is nowhere written down in clay, there is evidence that Babylonians understood its principles and applications.

One tablet, known as Plimpton 322 after one of its modern owners, has made headlines several times over the past few decades for showcasing Babylonian knowledge of the theorem. Each of the tablet's columns lists numbers, including integers that satisfy the formula $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$. To ascertain the tablet's purpose, Robson considered its mathematical content as well as its historical and intellectual context in her 2008 book *Mathematics in Ancient Iraq*, deducing that it was most likely a "list of regular reciprocal pairs" constructed with basic techniques taught in scribal schools for likely use in that very setting. The word problems, reciprocals lists, and lenticular exercises enjoyed and endured by Babylonian students in the early second millennium BC represent a major part—Robson estimates about 80 percent—of the published corpus of mathematical texts from ancient Mesopotamia.

The final phase of scribal education introduced more complex assignments, including proverbs, mock legal contracts, and eventually works of Sumerian literature like "Schooldays," "Eduba R," and "The Hymn to the Hoe." Such literature is in many ways a product of scribal education, which required students to reproduce these texts in various ways. "A scribe who does not know Sumerian," reads one Sumerian proverb that Babylonian scribes-in-training had to learn, "what kind of scribe is that?" Another asks, "A scribe who does not know Sumerian, from where will he produce a translation?" Other proverbs preserve kernels of wisdom—and some crude humor—outside scribal education. "Something that has never occurred since time immemorial: a young woman did not fart in her husband's embrace," one quips, while another laments a penis that "hangs like a damp reed" after excessive ejaculation.

These proverbs served as memorable tools to teach students not morality but increasingly advanced Sumerian vocabulary. Embedded in these collections of maxims are word associa-

tions, visual and phonological puns, and other tools to help students truly master the language and writing system. The Sumerian proverbs, including the ones about Sumerian itself, return us to the fundamentally bilingual nature of education in ancient Babylonia already apparent from “Schooldays.”

The tablets found in House F and similar archaeological contexts tell us much about education and scholarship, but they also immortalize moments in the lives of real children. Fingerprints cover the lenticular tablet with the square root of two, a poignant reminder that it was a young person who drew the square-shaped diagram and impressed the numerical wedges that have helped rewrite the history of mathematics. Another tablet features an angular drawing of a seated teacher below an excerpt from a Sumerian story about an enslaved girl. Could a bored student have resorted to doodling after finishing a literary assignment a little earlier than others in the class?

One lump of clay covered in messy signs looks as though someone tried to squish it, perhaps in frustration or merely as a sign that the practice tablet’s use had come to an end. A few fragments of gaming boards traced into clay tablets have survived from schools in ancient Babylonia, including one found in House F. One can imagine students at “recess” eating their lunches of “two breads” in a courtyard while moving a game piece across its squares.

Clay tablets from ancient Babylonian schools immortalize more than what students had to learn and how they learned it. They leave behind traces of the students themselves, including sometimes even their names, as in the case of the female scribe Belti-reminni, and hint at what their lives at school might have looked like. The texts that students copied at school were not meant for posterity, even though they have survived in such quantities and detail that it sometimes feels as though they were deliberately left behind for future students seeking to piece together the stories of their ancient counterparts.

These tablets were the rough drafts and scratch pads of the ancient world. They speak for students who spent a now uncountable number of days of their lives writing lists, memorizing lines, and learning how to multiply. They worked hard, lost patience, got nervous and maybe even bored. If “Schooldays” is to be believed, the students who copied the work must have had a sense of the importance of their education. At the start of the text, the student cowers before the “school father,” or teacher. At the end, the student’s father meets the “school father” and thanks him for letting his little one enter the realm of “silver” knowledge and for illuminating what once remained hidden behind cuneiform characters. “Seated in the seat of honor,”

> *The severity of a teacher is better than the love of a father.*
>
> *—Saadi, 1258*

the teacher praises the boy’s dedication and “with joyful heart” predicts a bright future:

> Young man, because you did not neglect
> my word, did not forsake it,
> May you reach the pinnacle of the scribal
> art, achieve it completely.
> Of your brothers, may you be their leader,
> Of your companions, may you be their hero,
> Exalted schoolboy may you be!

In addition to helping students learn Sumerian, “Schooldays” might have reminded them that the transformation from cowering student to exalted scribe—and champion of the goddess Nisaba—was worth the work. Along the way, their doodles, balled-up lumps of clay, and even bite marks remind us that the more things change, the more they stay the same. While education has changed much since these early moments memorialized in clay, some common denominators continue to connect us, four thousand years later, to the Babylonian kid who bit a tablet.



The Library, by Jacob Lawrence, 1966.

A SPECULATIVE ENDEAVOR

by Eleni Schirmer

Higher education in the United States is a speculative endeavor. It offers a means of inching toward something that does not quite exist but that we very badly want to realize—enlightenment, higher wages, national security. For individuals, it provides the lure of upward mobility, an illusion of escape from the lowest rungs of the labor market. For the federal government, it has charted a kind of statecraft, outlining its core commitments to military strength and economic growth, all the while absolving the state of the responsibility for ensuring that all its subjects have dignified means to live. We are told the path to decent wages and social respect must route through college.

The metric of higher education is credit; it runs on the belief of future value amid present uncertainty. This has readily lent to the in-

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dustry's financialization, the elaborate ways of using money to make more money rather than to produce goods and services. Today financialized systems of higher education mean that colleges and universities operate as investors or borrowers or both. University revenues increasingly come from financial activities, such as profits from endowment investments, real estate acquisitions, or leveraging student tuition. Simultaneously, financial costs—such as debt, interest, and fees—command a growing portion of university expenditures. Many universities allocate as much money to debt service as they do to entire departments; in 2020–21 the University of Wisconsin–Madison's debt-service budget was ten times the size of its student financial-aid budget. Similarly, students become either borrowers, taking on tens of thousands of dollars in debt to fund their tuition, or investors, betting on future earnings, thanks to the education they are accruing. For institutions and individuals alike, financialization compresses education into a means of accumulation.

Rising tuition and reduced public investment have created an ever-worsening student-debt crisis in the United States today, but students and families have struggled to pay for college since the nation's founding. Federal support for higher education has primarily manifested as tuition subsidies for students and their families rather than directly funding colleges, thereby rendering tuition obsolete. Before the Civil War, colleges operated predominantly as cloistered institutions where the elite could learn Latin and Greek and be trained as ministers. Often privately financed by wealthy donors, many of the largest and most prestigious schools, including Yale and Georgetown, were funded by profits from slavery and colonial exploits. With little public support, these universities were generally expensive to attend—in 1860 the cost of attending a college in the East represented a skilled worker's entire annual income—and as a result were open mostly to the moneyed, or at least those who could sacrifice years of lost wages in pursuit of a degree. The 1862 Morrill Act, which created the country's land-grant universities, marked the federal government's first intervention and investment in the nation's higher education system. The legislation relied on the expropriation of nearly eleven million acres of Native lands, which were transferred to state governments. In exchange for the Native land titles, the U.S. government promised Indigenous nations all of $400,000. In reality, it paid far less and in many cases nothing at all. Today those tracts are estimated to be worth $500 million. Over time the plundered lands became a special kind of credit factory: universities.

> *The only fence against the world is a thorough knowledge of it.*
>
> —*John Locke, 1695*

Throughout the nineteenth century, these newly founded universities heralded the ascendancy of science and industry, twinkling with a Baconian spirit of "useful knowledge." Lands would be surveyed, ships would be built, and corn would rise taller. The academic institutions were also framed as a matter of national security. In the aftermath of the Civil War, universities were envisioned as a substitute for food systems previously run by Southern plantations and on slave labor. Northern abolitionists, such as Republican representative Justin Morrill of Vermont, who sponsored the land-grant legislation, saw these universities' focus on agricultural science as a means of ensuring that the United States could sell crops even after the end of slavery. In 1890 a second Morrill Act established institutions specifically for African Americans.

But what likely cemented the role of the university as a mainstay of American statecraft was its mirage of democracy. Universities inspired not just visions of better soil tilling but also the means of upward mobility for even the most calloused hands. The sons (and some daughters) of white farmers could go to college and grab handfuls of the golden knowledge it offered. Between 1890 and 1940 the doors

swung open and enrollment in higher education increased fivefold. The vision was perhaps more powerful than its reality: only a slim minority of Americans ever enrolled in college. In 1940 not even 10 percent of the nation's eighteen-to-twenty-four-year-olds attended college.

World War II took the doors off their hinges thanks to the GI Bill, which rewarded surviving soldiers with access to free higher education. College and federally subsidized mortgages for veterans not locked out by anti-Black redlining were the government's program to absorb the sixteen million returning veterans. The GI Bill channeled mostly white men into college degrees that led to middle-class occupations suitable for servicing veterans' mortgages and providing a breadwinner's wage. Greasing a path to higher education had the added benefit of keeping disaffected veterans from jumping directly into a labor movement that was bursting with militancy. A 1947 Bureau of Labor Statistics report noted that the six months following World War II "marked the most concentrated period of labor-management strife" up till that date. Workers no longer tolerated the restrained wages justified by the war, and the end of wartime price controls meant that living costs spiked while wages flattened. Unbridled from the war's no-strike pledges, 4.6 million workers went on strike in 1946, with the average strike lasting twenty-four days. Rather than backing workers' demands for greater wage protections, the federal government passed the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act, which limited workers' organizing power and protected management's ability to thwart unions. Meanwhile, the GI Bill subsidized veterans' tuition, charting their path to higher wages while keeping them a safe distance from erupting shop floors. Seventy percent of male college graduates in 1949 were veterans. The federal government paid up to $4,400 (more

Financial Aid

Affording an education

c. 90: Lod
In a Talmudic story, the wife of the rabbi Akiva sells her hair to pay for her husband's Torah studies. After building his reputation as a scholar, Akiva repays his wife by giving her a crown of gold.

c. 125: Xanthos
An ancient Greek inscription records that an unnamed benefactor donated funds to pay for "the education and the nurture of all the children of the citizens" of Xanthos "for sixteen years."

c. 400: Athens
In a quip included in the ancient Greek joke book *Philogelos*, a broke aspiring philosopher finds himself forced to sell his schoolbooks. "Congratulate me," he writes to his father. "I'm already making a living from my books."

c. 630: Bihar
The Vardhana emperor Harsha commands a hundred villages to supply rice, butter, and milk to the community of scholars at Nalanda. This abundance, one Chinese observer writes, "is the source of the perfection of their studies."

c. 1050: Samarkand
The Qarakhanid ruler Tamghach Khan Ibrahim establishes a madrassa in Samarkand, stipulating in his *waqf-nama* (endowment deed) that students should receive instruction in philosophy, mathematics, history, and poetry, as well as religion.

1240: Oxford
Robert Grosseteste, the bishop of Lincoln, establishes Saint Frideswide's Chest, the first of many "loan chests" offering financial assistance to students and scholars at the University of Oxford. Borrowers are required to leave collateral in exchange for cash; textbooks are especially common deposits.

1268: Rouen
A church treasurer uses the revenue from his property to send twelve local students to Paris to study theology. "Such shall be chosen," he writes, "as are praiseworthy and upright in morals."

than $51,000 in 2022 dollars) for each soldier's degree and living expenses. Funded through tuition reimbursements, the GI Bill solidified the model of the federal government providing financial assistance for students.

Over the next decade, as the Cold War progressed, the federal government stepped up its higher education investments. Rather than just sop up the aftermath of war, the university would build a labor force specifically designed for the wars to come. In 1958, a year after the Soviet Union launched Sputnik 1, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed into law the National Defense Education Act, which comprehensively funded science and technology education. The policy was motivated by an overwhelming fear that America's science classrooms were somehow inferior to those in the USSR. The NDEA also established the first federal student-loan program by directly providing low-interest loans aimed at students who enrolled in defense-related fields, such as science, mathematics, and foreign languages.

When economists in the early 1960s noticed that countries with higher educational attainment also had more robust economic growth, a new policy paradigm began to emerge. Heavily influenced by the thinking of the economist Theodore Schultz, mainstream politicians embraced the idea of education as a means of transforming humans into a resource very much like capital. Like little coins, properly invested humans could increase the country's supply of money, patriotism, and perhaps even democracy. Schultz believed that cultivating human capital via education would ameliorate a hardening system of economic inequality. "Truly, the most distinctive feature of our economic system is the growth in human capital," he wrote. "Without it there would be only hard manual work and poverty except for those who have income from property." Education appeared to

• 1371: **Alsfeld**
The priest Sibold Rotzmaul establishes a church fund to subsidize fourteen years' study at "a privileged university" for select parishioners, noting that the support will be revoked if the beneficiaries "seek leisure and rest" rather than spend their time "usefully in study."

1588: **Cambridge** •
The term *sizar* is first used for an undergraduate student at Cambridge who receives financial relief in exchange for menial work, typically delivering food and supplies to scholars. The equivalent term at Oxford is *servitor*.

1760: **Hà Tĩnh** •
Vietnamese scholar and diplomat Nguyễn Huy Oánh donates twenty acres of "good land" to the Phúc Giang Academy. Parents unable to afford school fees can farm part of the land in exchange for their children's education.

1838: **Cambridge, MA** •
Funded by wealthy alumni, the Harvard Loan Program begins offering private, zero-interest loans to students who cannot otherwise afford to attend the school.

1909: **Sikkim** •
The maharaja Sidkeong Tulku Namgyal decrees that particularly diligent students in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries should be provided with free tea and soup until they complete their studies. The students are also exempt from certain taxes and corvée "commensurate with their achievements."

1943: **Washington, DC** •
Franklin D. Roosevelt introduces the GI Bill in a fireside chat, citing a need for veterans to "not be demobilized…to a place on a breadline." Over the following twelve years, more than two million veterans use the program to pay for college.

2010: **London** •
An estimated fifty thousand demonstrators march in response to a Conservative Party plan to increase university tuition while cutting teaching budgets. "We're in the fight of our lives," a student organizer says. "We face an unprecedented attack on our future before it has even begun."

2014: **Lower Saxony** •
Less than a decade after a federal court decision allows its public universities to begin charging students, Lower Saxony follows its peer states in abolishing tuition. "In Germany, historically," one university representative says, "people have not learned that studying costs something."

1300 · 1650 · 2010

offer an almost magical way of improving the national economy, bolstering national security, and bettering poor people's fates—all without having to overhaul the system of capitalism.

Schultz's model of human capital captured the attention of key liberal policy makers, including Clark Kerr, a labor economist who served as president of the University of California system from 1958 to 1967. Inspired by the Schultzian vision of higher education as a profitable investment, Kerr set to work ensuring that the university would serve as the key vehicle for building national economic power, akin to "what the railroads did for the second half of the last century and the automobile for the first half of this century." He was especially keen to include women, people of color, and low-income students. This program for higher education powerfully consolidated several key prongs of the liberal accord: it pledged a commitment to domestic social inclusion while preparing the "knowledge workers" necessary for the country's petrochemical, agrochemical, and defense industries.

You send your child to the schoolmaster, but 'tis the schoolboys who educate him.
—Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1860

In 1965 this vision of higher education became the law of the land under President Lyndon B. Johnson's Higher Education Act. The HEA also created the basic architecture of today's student-loan industry. Whereas the 1958 NDEA had authorized the U.S. Treasury to lend money to students, student loans under the HEA originated with private banks but were backed by the federal government. These loans were first available only to low-income borrowers, but eventually all students became eligible. This significant expansion of the student-loan business proved to be a very profitable arrangement for private banks, which took all the profits but absorbed none of the risks.

In addition to shifting student loans into the hands of private banks, the HEA significantly increased federal spending for higher education. It distributed federal aid to historically Black colleges and universities, opened bridge programs to encourage first-generation students to pursue college degrees, and paved the way for the Pell Grant program, which allocates federal funds to low-income college students. Though hardly perfect, this system of federally funded higher education enabled unprecedented numbers of students to enroll in higher education at no or very low cost.

In the context of social struggles, an education is more like a bonfire on a winter night than a table lamp in a hallway. It illuminates society's haunted and austere structures, the precious life within. It draws people together. It does not ensure comfort. By the mid-1960s universities provided a critical gathering place for activists as the nation plunged into a deeply unpopular war in Vietnam, and legacies of racist and sexist inequalities unleashed new currents of social-movement organizing. Colleges and universities incubated the Black power movement, women's liberation organizing, the free speech movement, and antiwar mobilization. Students were not content simply to learn about the structures of the world; they fought to transform them. Many of these movements pushed back against the "knowledge society" that planned militaristic, capitalist endpoints for education. If education had become the means to build a new society, it could also be the means to dismantle a dysfunctional one.

It was precisely the liberatory capacity of education that quickly drove conservative policy makers and pundits to oppose publicly funded, free higher education. The radical potential of public higher education had proved dangerous because it could be harnessed to social movements capable of challenging the systems of oppression that support the status quo. To fulfill the promise of education as human capital, education had to be chained to its economic role and divorced from its revolutionary possibilities. A key leader of this effort was economist Milton Friedman. In response

to protests by "intolerant radicals" at the University of Chicago, Friedman wrote in 1969, "We must do some drastic rethinking if we are to preserve the university as the home of reason, persuasion, and free discussion."

For Friedman, that meant shifting the costs of education onto students. As a kind of capital, education counted as private property, and its cost should be shouldered by the individual beneficiary, not the public. He adamantly opposed state investment in collective education, instead favoring a voucher-style system for individuals, similar to how the GI Bill provided grants to veterans rather than eliminating tuition. Friedman's design for higher education had in fact undergirded the 1958 Treasury-funded student loans. But both the GI Bill and the NDEA were time-bound, short-term programs; Friedman sought a long-lasting policy framework to contain his ideology. He found no better executor of his vision than Ronald Reagan.

Almost immediately upon becoming governor of California, Reagan campaigned to impose tuition and fees on the state's previously free university system, a thinly veiled punishment for student activism. Guided by Friedman's free-market ideology, Reagan recast free tuition, up until then a beloved public benefit, as an unfair public entitlement that forced taxpayers to fund the reading habits of communists, gays, and bra-burning peaceniks. Higher education, he and Friedman believed, was like all things American: it should come from hard work, sweat, and credit. Over the next two decades, as Reagan moved from Sacramento to the White House, he continued his assault on free higher education. It is thanks to his administration that it is now widely assumed that college should be funded through tuition, and tuition financed through loans, reversing decades of state-funded and either tuition-free or very low-cost public higher education. While Democratic and Republican legislators disagreed on the mechanics of the student-loan market, both parties agreed on the basic premise: the ticket to higher education would be bought through borrowed money rather than public funding.

Through the 1980s and 1990s, Congress' major interventions in higher education loosened rules of credit. Legislators increased borrowing limits, relaxed regulations, and authorized new high-risk financial instruments for borrowers who had exhausted all other options. Parents could now take on virtually unlimited debt on behalf of their children, for example. An explosion of growth in private lenders followed the creation of new asset-backed securities that enabled lenders to divest long-term risk. New developments in financial technologies, such as student loan asset-backed securities, transformed student loans into tradable securities, yielding huge gains for investors who bought student debt and resold it at a profit. At the same time, Congress rolled back basic consumer protections for student borrowers, making refinancing and deferment or cancellation via bankruptcy (or even death) nearly impossible, while authorizing lenders to garnish wages, tax returns, disability payments, and Social Security checks.

> *Education is a wonderful thing. If you couldn't sign your name you'd have to pay cash.*
> —*Rita Mae Brown, 1988*

It was only a matter of time until lines of credit morphed into chains of debt. Today student debt hovers at $1.7 trillion, saddling 45 million borrowers with tens of thousands of dollars of debt. Financing higher education this way is a poverty tax: those who have the least access to wealth end up with the highest costs. The longer a borrower takes to pay back his or her loan, the more he or she pays in interest, raising the price tag of the degree. Regressive wage disparities in the labor market further exacerbate these inequalities. On average, a Black man makes 22 percent less per hour—and a Black woman 34 percent less—than a white man. As a result, Black borrowers end up paying more for the same degree than white students

do. Women also carry higher debt loads than men, with Black women the most burdened by student debt. For all its mystique, a vision of higher education based on human capital does not transform society so much as it intensifies existing social dynamics: the elite climb higher; the poor get poorer. The notion of education as human capital is no longer a poetic metaphor but a terrifying reality: students have become capital, their debts purchased, reinvested, and gambled upon. After years of diligently making payments, many borrowers find their balance far greater than the amount they initially borrowed, thanks to compound interest. Rather than provide the path out of poverty promised by higher education, student loans trap borrowers in cycles of poverty.

Rising student debt has educational and societal consequences. Students choose majors based on the careers that will service their debt, learning how to engineer drones or navigate the jargon of business management. For the past twenty years, business has been the most popular department in the country, accounting for almost 20 percent of college majors. While the nation has faced an acute K–12 teacher shortage for almost a decade, less than 5 percent of all college graduates have majored in education since 2015—an alarming reversal from 1970, when 20 percent of college graduates studied education. A student now needs a job that will pay back debt rather than fulfill social-welfare needs. The United States desperately needs rural dentists, public-interest lawyers, social workers, and nurses, but the comparatively low wages and high degree costs of these professions drive people away from pursuing such work.

It isn't just students who find themselves in debt as a result of these policies. For the past five decades, tax cuts have reduced state coffers, forcing public institutions to reduce budgets. These institutions have taken on increasing amounts of debt to keep their doors open. From 2009 to 2019, the institutional debt of U.S. colleges and universities rose 71.1 percent, amounting to more than $336 billion. Rising institutional debt has two main effects. First, more of an institution's revenue must be

Ancient School Built According to the Egyptian and Greek Manners, by Giovanni Battista Piranesi, 1750.



set aside to pay interest and fees as the first budgeting priority. Before workers get paid or buildings get renovated, funds are reserved to pay back creditors, often years in advance. Second, credit ratings become institutions' lifelines. Preserving credit scores becomes key; a low credit score makes borrowing money more difficult and expensive. Schools with large endowments maintain high ratings by maintaining millions in reserves, but dipping into these accounts to pay for operations could damage their scores. This partially explains why, amid a global pandemic, universities furloughed workers and continued to charge full tuition rather than tap their endowments, which have earned record profits. Credit-rating companies scrutinize a university's power to enact unilateral fiscal actions—collective-bargaining agreements and shared governance are seen not as democratic mechanisms vital to the institution's health but as impositions on its ability to shut down programs, cut wages, or raise tuition. Universities invest in marketing departments, flashy student centers, and winning athletic teams to secure brand loyalty, paying customers, and revenue streams. If these tactics happen also to yield scholars, democrats, or simply future workers, that's fine.

Education is not alone. Financing public goods through debt reflects a transformation of the political economy over the past five decades that the economic sociologist Wolfgang Streeck has termed the transition from a tax state to a debt state. Social services previously provided through progressive taxation, such as free tuition, are now available only by taking on debt. Now you must use debt to finance not only higher education but also health care, housing, even your own imprisonment, as carceral systems increasingly rely on court fees and fines. The threadbare welfare state runs thanks to widespread credit, rather than taxing corporations or top earners.

The resulting austerity doesn't just result in fewer and worse public services and widening inequality as financiers increase their wealth while the vast majority goes into debt; it also diminishes democracy. Funding priorities, such as what public services a society needs, are determined by creditors; elected officials and voters are relegated to secondary actors at best. As austerity subsumes the nation, debt becomes its heartbeat.

What does it mean to have a nation under debt? Austerity leads not just to unequally distributed money but also to unevenly distributed time. Working people dash from job to job, scrambling to pay one damn bill after the next. When I ask my students what they would do differently in college if there were no such thing as debt, virtually all of them tell me they would focus more on their studies and work fewer jobs. A few would change majors and take more art classes.

Debt makes us rush, but it also forces us to wait—for a relief check to finally arrive, for the White House to decide whether our student loans remain in deferment—or to stay in a job or a relationship long past its expiration date. Making people wait, the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu observed, is an integral part of domination. My students enroll in college and take on debt in order to sell their future time at higher rates. They may realize their debt will be best serviced by managing a fast-food restaurant instead of working as an elementary school teacher.

I think about all this as I wait for the bus on a busy street in a mixed-income neighborhood, staring at the advertisement for a local university. A picture of a smiling woman with a curly black Afro and impeccable teeth beckons: "Return to learning!" The image suggests that her education has led her to a decent hourly wage, existential satisfaction, and a dentist. *How many semesters' worth of tuition did this ad cost?* I wonder absentmindedly. When the bus stops half a mile away in an upper-class neighborhood, an advertisement on the same street displays a gleaming luxury watch. A diamond-studded second hand twirls; a bank account somewhere swells. The working class wager how best to sell their time more lucratively. The wealthy sit back and let the earnings roll in. Time itself profits the investor.

Credit, writes the economic historian William Goetzmann, is a time machine. Its seemingly magical capabilities convert current resources into future value. The heart of all finance systems lies in a simple time proposition: let this money become something more later. Credit serves as both the fast-forward *and* the plus button, telling a story of what might come. Debt is the story of what it all meant in the end. Creditors leverage stories of the past to justify actions in the future—whose debts get wiped clean and whose remain on the books for generations. If credit enables stories to move forward, debt indexes them. Debt covenants, the legal contracts of debt, frequently stipulate the payment order; in times of scarcity, these covenants mandate creditors' rights to the most valuable resources, putting liens on crops and intercepting state aid for public schools to service debts. Debt creates a fixed plot, carving a line between two points: now and the next payment. It is this seizure of hope that roused the anti-austerity Spanish *indignados*' cry "No Future." In a time of debt, can there be such a thing as a future?

> *Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*
> —*Proverbs, c. 350* BC

Education, which consists of its own system of credits, is also a time machine. It is a means to carry us to unknown horizons. It can dial the world forward. But it also steers important questions backward. What *are* our debts to one another? To the enslaved people who labored to build and maintain the institutions of learning? To the Indigenous nations whose land was expropriated for universities' founding? To the millions of acts of unpaid and underpaid care labor undergirding each hour of scholarship—the wife typing out her scientist husband's manuscript, the nanny minding the children while the professor works late, the janitor sweeping the hallways into the night? What would the civilization that paid back these debts look like? What kind of universities would be guided by these questions? I remember the look on a student's face after reading Silvia Federici's 1974 essay "Wages Against Housework." Aghast, her cheeks slightly flushed, she realized she had built a vision for her life around a career that would allow her time both to make a wage and provide for a family. But why was she expected to have a family in the first place? And, more to the point, why was the labor of caring for others uncompensated? Her classmates fell silent when she asked education's most dangerous question: Could there be another way?

The heart of this inquiry is a time proposition: an appraisal of past harms, an investment in future repair. An education driven by these questions is a speculative endeavor; it conjures a possible world into existence. But it gestures to something beyond mere accumulation—whether of wages, war power, or return on investment. An education that journeys into these questions is not an easy one. The late bell hooks wrote in 1994's *Teaching to Transgress*, "Sometimes the mountaintop is difficult to reach with all our resources, factual and confessional, so we are just there collectively grasping, feeling the limitations of knowledge, longing together, yearning for a way to reach that highest point. Even this yearning is a way to know." An education may not provide answers to these questions, but it can offer a gathering point, a place to ground the struggles necessary to answer them.

The classic image associated with higher education is the ivory tower. In some ways this is a fitting icon. A tower is used to hoard stores, surveil subjects, monitor enemy activity. So, too, has the university been used to accumulate and privatize resources and to build warfare capacity. But that is not its only tradition. The word *campus* comes from the Latin for "field," and perhaps that legacy offers an alternative icon. Like a field, an education is open and muddy and ambiguous, available for play as well as production. Its outcomes are uncertain, its future dependent upon the struggles and labors that root within it.



Mongol prince studying the Quran, miniature from a fourteenth-century edition of Rashid al-Din's *Compendium of Chronicles*.

MISDIRECTIVES

by Ian Altman

One late fall morning in 2010, a high school junior walked past my classroom door and asked me to call Georgia's senators, Saxby Chambliss and Johnny Isakson, and request that they support the DREAM Act, legislation that opens a path to U.S. citizenship for undocumented minors and would soon face a cloture vote. Without thinking, I said, "Sure, of course." Elizabeth had been my literature student in ninth grade and would be again the next semester. She has a wild intelligence, introspective and supremely intense. She was halfway down the hall by the time I did a double take and realized what she had revealed to me.

"Those sons of bitches," I thought. "They can't do this to her." Georgia bans undocumented students from applying to its top state schools, including our hometown of Athens' University of Georgia and Atlanta's Georgia Tech. The next time we spoke, I assured her that I would do everything in my meager power to help her find a way into college.

The next year, when Elizabeth was a senior, I brought her and two other undocumented students to UGA's student center to tell their stories to a wider audience. We had reserved a room for about eighty people. Over two hundred showed up. I had just made my

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The Village School, by Ferdinand de Braekeleer, 1852.

brief introduction when we hit capacity and had to move to a larger room. As I was collecting a handful of cords and microphones, I noticed a large man talking to Elizabeth, leaning in toward her. Then someone told me, "Get her away from him. That's our state senator." Frank Ginn had supported a copycat version of Arizona's "show me your papers" law that would allow local law enforcement to detain persons they had any cause to believe were undocumented. He was demanding that Elizabeth explain what she meant when she said she was "undocumented," as if the word hid a more fundamental fact about her. He played a cheap game, interrupting her calm responses, trying to get her to admit to some form of criminality. I walked between them and drew him away from her. Afterward Ginn tried to take pictures of the students speaking. This was a year before the announcement of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy, which allowed people who had entered the country as children to apply for legally recognized status, and Ginn's behavior caused real fear. Fortunately, he sat too far back for the pictures to be usable.

Elizabeth handled the episode well and didn't need my help. In 2012 she got herself out of Georgia, earning a full academic ride to Syracuse University. She is married to another former student of mine and now has a green card. Unlike far too many similar stories, hers has a happy ending. But that image of a middle-aged man, an elected official, publicly and without shame bullying a legally vulnerable seventeen-year-old kid stays with me. Later I received anonymous hate mail after I wrote an op-ed about helping undocumented students.

I teach primarily American literature and an AP rhetoric course, but over my sixteen years at a public high school, I've taught most of the courses offered in our English department, from a ninth-grade survey to British and multicultural literature. My route into teaching was circuitous. I had studied philosophy as an undergraduate in the 1990s in part because

the injunction that learning should deliberately produce a career offended me. Not that I was hoodwinked by some romantic notion of learning for its own sake—I was curious about the nature and history of knowledge as such, and thus about literature, history, and other languages, so I pursued studies that kept me reading with no goal in sight. In those years I worked odd jobs and occasionally made the rent by seeking out drunks at dartboards, but I always paid attention to people, how they learned and what they thought about.

One of the jobs that best prepared me for teaching was working in maintenance for rental properties. Athens is a small city, but in general UGA students, living in their self-contained world, have no idea what the town is really like. I repaired the electricity and plumbing in Section 8 apartments occupied by people who worked as custodians and landscapers at UGA. Many of them had to take other jobs to keep afloat, while the land-grant institution that employed them pays no property taxes to support the public schools. It was not just the inequity of the situation that struck me but the realization that this is how generational poverty persists and how easy it was to be blind to the town where I'd lived for ten years. You have to know your community to teach in it.

I kept thinking about a seminar I'd taken years before on the political ethics of secession. It had prompted me to research educational policies and how they affect liberal and communitarian views on, and clashes about, the right of free association. I was interested in disputes between Amish communities and states mandating education, and I had always been bothered by the white-flight private schools that proliferated after integration in Macon, where I grew up. It was easy to see the racism, but underneath that I saw a kind of cowardice that was just as contemptible—a refusal to acknowledge or take part in the public good. For the right to free association to have meaning, the possibilities for association must be known, and the state should have the power to mandate some level of that learning. I'd make the argument differently now than I did in my early twenties, but I still believe this; it is entailed by the basic Enlightenment principle that it is always, in every case, better to know than not to know. Maybe parents will be a little afraid of what their kids learn in school. Knowledge can lead to dissent, setting students on a path to leave a religion, a party, or a country. So be it.

It's never been just the kids who have things to learn about the world. That is particularly true of our elected officials, and not only those like Frank Ginn. He was serving a nativist ideology that blinded him to substantive knowledge about Elizabeth—her intellect, her personality, her astounding ability to learn new languages as if by absorption from the ether, her moral strength. To him she was a living example of something he disapproved of, as if her existence were somehow unethical by nature. But many of us, including teachers, likewise see students as representations, and the ideology we have to serve—creating good consumers, rather than independent people who possess both knowledge and humility—also prevents us from appreciating who students are. We don't ask too many questions about their real selves. In part that is the way it should be. Students' private lives should remain private, and when they come to me with personal problems, it is always a fine line I walk to address them. I wouldn't have known Elizabeth's immigration status, and it would have been unethical to have asked, if she hadn't come to me for help.

> *In education, as elsewhere, the broad primrose path leads to a nasty place.*
> *—Alfred North Whitehead, 1916*

Our general directive is to make students useful, though we elevate this injunction with talk of dreams and riches and conflate it with being a good citizen. Much of what public school teachers do—prompted by state and federal requirements—is more like training than education. We have formulas to instruct students how to write paragraphs that resemble the equation

$y = mx + b$, for defining the slope intercept of a line, and we use those instead of teaching students to think carefully about what to write, to consider why it's worth writing about and how best to communicate it clearly and creatively. We have largely trained students to demand to be taught what to do and how to follow a formula, diminishing their capacity to question, rather than teaching them how to think, to ask why. Education is reduced to schooling.

Forty-six states, including Georgia, have "academic standards" either derived from or directly copied from the Common Core State Standards, created in 2009 by committees in the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers. The standards are intended to "drive instruction," redirecting teaching above the heads of the teachers themselves. We are not supposed to decide what to teach. Instead we rely on the standards, so named to assure both equity and quality.

The child is the starting point, the center, and the end. His development, his growth, is the ideal.

—John Dewey, 1902

Instruction is a curious word, and its etymology is telling: to pile on, to build. The term is invoked as if teachers were laypeople who might not know what their job is until they've studied prescribed, delineated procedures. I tease my colleagues that instructions are found in repair manuals: how to change your oil, how to configure a hard drive, rules of form to affect consternation in faculty meetings. Teaching, on the other hand, is related to pointing out, showing. Instruction merely happens to students. Teaching implies the involvement of students' imaginations. What we do should be called *teaching*, not *instruction*. A minor quibble but emblematic of the condescension both teachers and students endure.

There are generally agreed-upon principles for how to plan standards-based teaching. We call it "backward design" and have elaborate meetings about it. We describe what we want students to learn to do in a unit of study, ask what smaller pieces they'll need to achieve that, and design the smaller pieces to build to the goal of "mastering" standards. This is elementary and normal, and sometimes unobjectionable. But we are supposed to use the same method for teaching literature, and that is where the standards as "drivers of instruction" fall apart. This failure of theory, which we are forced by punitive evaluations to enact in practice, is compounded by standardized tests. Both students who fail and those who ace these exams suffer: failures are subjected to remediation and told that they don't know enough yet and feel the strain of judgment; aces are praised for high achievement but often know that the accolades don't mean much. Either way we perpetrate a kind of fraud, verifying that students have gained knowledge by means that have no bearing on what they truly know.

Teachers frequently complain of having to "teach to the test." In reply, administrators tell us that if we simply teach the standards, then the tests shouldn't be a problem. Often our complaints are small: We had too good of a time with Marianne Moore and modernist poetry, and we didn't give enough time to the Romantics. Alas, the semester is short, and the test had Emily Dickinson. But I mean something else. When we follow the instructions to teach the standards with "fidelity" and "laser-like focus," as our professional jargon calls it, we actively impede literacy. A favorite book of some of my students, including Elizabeth, is John Steinbeck's *East of Eden*, which I never assigned; they came to it on their own. Yet we spoke at length about it in class, and I showed them the relevant Hebrew passage in Genesis. Another student made a fascinating watercolor to help convey her interpretation of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, and her painting became the cover illustration for the book *Teaching Outside the Box but Inside the Standards*. One student independently read Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, and I had the fraught task of

trying to convince her that Humbert was not the victim. Mary Crow Dog's *Lakota Woman* helped students recognize the impact of colonialism on how we make sense of ourselves and our national identity. All these experiences came from teaching books, not standards.

Yet professional training regimes assume that when we teach the standards instead of books, our efforts are generalizable, applicable to all books. The English Common Core standard 2 for grades eleven and twelve states, "Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text." This is repeated verbatim in Georgia's Standards of Excellence.

Let us compare how this dictum applies to two texts taught in many high school classrooms: Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* and Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. Both are mid-twentieth-century American dramas with male protagonists in their thirties, both are concerned with social and political problems that have twenty-first-century reverberations, and both have themes of guilt and of people struggling to find the moral strength to live and die with integrity. If I teach *The Crucible* to one class and *A Raisin in the Sun* to another, the standards maintain that students should have equivalent academic experiences.

But it is entirely possible for student A, reading *A Raisin in the Sun*, to understand that Walter Younger stands up to Karl Lindner in the name of his family's honor, and for student B, reading *The Crucible*, to think John Proctor a coward, rather than someone who chooses to die to preserve his own sense of honor. Students may find it easier to imagine Walter facing down racism and redlining than to imagine John deciding to hang and forgo his obligation to raise his children. Did student B miss the point of the play? How do we assess their understanding? Should they be penalized for an unorthodox reading in an analytical essay? I'd say no, but many teachers would say yes. Facing a question about the correct understanding of a theme—as though interpretation and discussion of literature could be reduced to that question—on a reductive multiple-choice exam, they have no opportunity to communicate their thoughts. The test itself seems to be specifically designed to obstruct thinking. Neither student's answers would reveal any datum fit to be graphed or further facts about their grasp of "theme" or "central ideas" according to the standard. Each book requires its own historical and religious awareness, philosophical orientation, and emotional vector. Reducing the understanding of complex literary and political ideas to the practice of skills, as standards-based teaching directs, is entirely beside the point of reading and elides the very ideas students are supposed to comprehend. This is one reason too many students don't like to read: we've burdened them with tasks to fulfill instead of revelations to be found. Although we are directed to teach standards, not books, such standards exist only because of books, and the books themselves are not standard in any meaningful sense. Our official instructional directives are not wrong, in any way we can differentiate them from right, because they are articulate gibberish.

> *Education is the most powerful weapon which we can use in order to prepare our youth for their role as leaders of tomorrow.*
> *—Nelson Mandela, 1990*

This leaves it open for us to teach almost anything and use the standards to justify it without overtaxing our imaginations. There is no reason we cannot expand the themes literature addresses beyond the vanilla universals of high school anthologies. We can teach *A Raisin in the Sun* alongside the history of redlining, the ever-present dangers of resurgent McCarthyism with *The Crucible*, Toni Morrison's handling of the white gaze in *The Bluest Eye*, William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* as a nihilistic burlesque of the hero's journey, James Baldwin's evocation of the utter madness of white Americans' sense of identity in "The Uses of

the Blues" or "A Talk to Teachers." This is part of what makes the job worth keeping.

And yet this is not enough—or is perhaps too much, judging from the contemporary debate. I was happy when a student told me that it was ludicrous to think teachers could have so much power to change students' worldviews and arrogant of us to believe we could. I've had several students come to visit years after they graduated to tell me they didn't quite realize what I was trying to do in their courses until they were well into college, and they thanked me for insisting that they learn how to come up with their own thoughts on their own terms. Parents have frequently told me this as well. Yet we are relentlessly directed to make our students into productive citizens—not thoughtful, not good, not critical, but productive. And students will be more useful, more compliant, if we do not discuss or even provide the intellectual space for thinking about their lived political realities.

The current horde of book banners and goons at education board meetings (not a new thing in this country) could be seen as evidence of how education fails, thanks to teachers dutifully following instructions and carefully avoiding the touchy political matters that lie at the heart of any serious study of literature and history. These adults' caterwauling grew out of the wholesome compliance and deference to rules and decorum they learned in school, though without seeming to have paid much attention to what they read. We do not need to look beyond ostensibly respectable classics to see the irony that almost anything worth reading and studying will be filled with morally ambiguous and repugnant characters, narrate foolish or appalling behavior, and cause us to engage with discomfiting ideas. The desire to avoid good literature—or to teach it badly, as though it were somehow safe—comes at the cost of intellectual and moral stunting.

It is not unusual, for example, to find antiheroes in American war novels: Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* has Henry Fleming fleeing the battle and seeking to overcome his shame; in Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, Frederic Henry takes shrapnel while eating a piece of cheese, saying that words like *cour-*

School Scene (detail), China, fourteenth to seventeenth century.



age are obscene, and escapes summary execution from his own allies; Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* identifies not the Nazis but the U.S. Army bureaucracy as Yossarian's enemy. As for family values, recall Mercutio teasing Romeo with an image of anal sex, Edna Pontellier's adultery and suicide in *The Awakening*, Odysseus and Telemachus torturing Melanthius to death and feeding his genitals to dogs. And race cannot be sidelined: the tragedy of Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* is caused not by incest but by the threat of miscegenation, and Richard Wright's *Native Son* spins a doomed web with an executioner at its heart. We don't need any theory, critical or otherwise, to justify teaching these books. This is the work of a public school teacher. Teachers didn't invent the subversion threaded throughout canonical literature or the thorns and complexity of history. Reading anything worthwhile means discovering those ideas, as I did when a student's comment about the theft of Black Americans' history caused me to rethink how I taught August Wilson's play *The Piano Lesson*. As I thought about what he said, it became clear to me how different it is merely to have history than to possess it, with all the ethical and political weight that possession carries. Teaching that through the play's symbolism gave students a new way to interpret some facets of America's twentieth century. Perhaps some adults are frightened not of what students will learn about themselves but of what they'll learn about their parents and older generations.

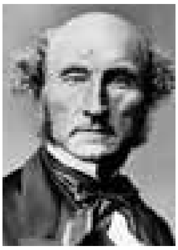
Those who trouble over this could learn something from Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. In it Ivan dreams that the Grand Inquisitor arrests the risen Christ to preserve happiness and the security of not having to choose good over evil, arguing that having the power of choice does not help the church, that moral freedom is too awful a burden for most people to bear. We wouldn't be wrong to detect Lucifer's pride in the inquisitor's arguments. For all their talk of liberty, those who would threaten and abuse teachers and proclaim which books are evil seem awfully afraid of their children having the power to choose virtue.

In *The Ancients and the Moderns*, the philosopher Stanley Rosen elaborates what a conservative education, based on the principle that whatever is not explicitly permitted is forbidden, would look like: a kind of self-immolation. Scientific and all critical thinking would be disallowed. Books would burn, and in every generation the guardians would have to destroy all children above a certain modest intellect. And if they were successful, "will there not come a time when the guardians are themselves too dull-witted to separate the dangerous children from their innocuous brothers and sisters?" asks Rosen. "Safety requires that *all* children be destroyed: that is the ultimate absurdity of the attack against the Enlightenment." Of course, no one has actually proposed such a preposterous scheme. (Though perhaps we could be forgiven for wondering what to make of our outrageous history of school shootings.) But this is the final form of the conservative paradigm, and "if the paradigm is itself absurd, then it cannot serve as a noble or prudent standard by which to rectify our own baseness."

> *That elasticity of imagination and compassion is what writing and reading promote.*
> *—Julia Alvarez, 2008*

It should not be surprising that students often view school with wariness. We don't give them enough credit: they know something is missing even if they can't fully articulate it. They need a reason to learn that is not extrinsic, not merely tied to employability and being a productive citizen and reliable consumer. Most of them suspect that those qualities are not enough to make them good people. So I return to the Enlightenment principle that it is always better to know than not to know, tempered by the Socratic wisdom of being self-aware enough to know of our own ignorance. This is the key to demanding better of our politicians and of ourselves and our history, because the unexamined life is not worth living. I will never ask permission to say this or to teach students how to see it.

CONVERSATIONS



JOHN STUART MILL .... BETSY DEVOS



On Liberty, 1859

If the government would make up its mind to require for every child a good education, it might save itself the trouble of providing one. This might leave it to parents to obtain the education where and how they pleased, and content itself with helping to pay the school fees of the poorer classes of children and defraying the entire school expenses of those who have no one else to pay for them. The objections which are urged with reason against state education do not apply to the enforcement of education by the state but to the state's taking upon itself to direct that education, which is a totally different thing. That the whole or any large part of the education of the people should be in state hands, I go as far as anyone in deprecating. All that has been said of the importance of individuality of character, and diversity in opinions and modes of conduct, involves, as of the same unspeakable importance, diversity of education. A general state education is a mere contrivance for molding people to be exactly like one another; and as the mold in which it casts them is that which pleases the predominant power in the government, whether this be a monarch, a priesthood, an aristocracy, or the majority of the existing generation, in proportion as it is efficient and successful, it establishes a despotism over the mind, leading by natural tendency to one over the body. An education established and controlled by the state should only exist, if it exist at all, as one among many competing experiments.

A speech, 2020

Too many politicians heed the shrill voices of the education lobby and ignore the voices of children, parents, teachers, and health experts who are begging to get our students back to learning. As for me, I fight for America's students. I fight for their parents. And I fight against anyone who would have government be the parent to everyone. Now many in Washington think because of their power there they can make decisions for parents everywhere. In that troubling scenario, the school building replaces the home, the child becomes a pawn, and the state replaces the family. That sequence has played itself out too many times throughout the course of human history. I said from day one that I'd like to work myself out of a job. That I'd work to empower parents, not politicians. To that end, we restored state, local, and family control of education. We joined Montana parents in their fight all the way to the Supreme Court, ending the "last acceptable prejudice" made manifest in bigoted Blaine amendments, which denied students the freedom to pursue faith-based education. And we support the bipartisan School Choice Now Act, which would directly fund families and empower them to choose the best educational setting for their children. The scholarships could support students attending the school that best meets their needs or matches their values. At the end of the day, we want parents to have the freedom, the choices, and the funds to make the best decisions for their children.



THEODORE DWIGHT WELD

A report, 1832

Who can educate their sons at college? Not more than one family in twenty. Thus nineteen-twentieths of our population is shut out from the advantages of education in the higher branches; and as knowledge is power, the sons of the rich, by enjoying advantages for the acquisition of this power vastly superior to others, may secure for themselves a monopoly on those honors and emoluments which are conferred upon the well educated. In this way society is divided into castes. The laboring classes become hewers of wood and drawers of water for the educated. The two parties stand wide asunder, no bond of companionship uniting them, no mutual sympathies incorporating them into one mass, no equality of privileges striking a common level for both. The chasm between them, even in this republican government, already yawns deep and broad; and if it be not speedily bridged, by bringing education within the reach of the poor, it will widen into an impassable gulf, and our free institutions, our national character, our bright visions of the future, our glory, and our joy, will go down into it.

CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY



An editorial in *Peking Review*, 1966

While the main activity of the workers is in industry, they should at the same time also study military affairs, politics, and culture. They should also take part in the socialist education movement and in criticizing the bourgeoisie.

While the main activity of the peasants in the communes is in agriculture (including forestry, animal husbandry, side occupations, and fisheries), they, too, should at the same time study military affairs, politics, and culture. Where conditions permit, they should also collectively run some small factories. They should also criticize the bourgeoisie.

This holds true for students as well. While their main task is to study, they should learn other things; that is, industrial work, farming, and military affairs. They should also criticize the bourgeoisie. The period of schooling should be shortened, education should be revolutionized, and the domination of our schools by bourgeois intellectuals should by no means be allowed to continue.

By acting in accordance with what Comrade Mao Zedong has said, it will be possible to promote the step-by-step narrowing of the gap between workers and peasants, town and countryside, and mental and manual labor; to enable intellectuals to become at the same time manual workers, and manual workers at the same time intellectuals.

MISCELLANY

In 1961 Mary Ingraham Bunting established the Radcliffe Institute for Independent Study, a research center for women with PhDs or "the equivalent" in creative achievement who had been forced to leave academia and the workforce. A 1960 brochure advertising the program warns that "this sense of stagnation can become a malignant factor even in the best of marriages," but that women no longer need be "crusaders and reformers" because "the bitter battles for women's rights are history."

The Umayyad poet Dhu al-Rumma, of the Bedouin tradition, was known to ask his listeners to transcribe his poems as he was reciting them, declaring that a book "does not forget or alter words or phrases which have taken the poet a long time to compose."

Abdul Kassem Ismael, a tenth-century Persian grand vizier and author of an extensive Arabic dictionary, had a library of 117,000 volumes. According to one account, the scholar declined an invitation to serve in the court of the Samanid ruler Nuh II, insisting that four hundred camels would be required to transport his library. Other accounts report that Ismael did undergo the trip, and that the camels were lined up in the alphabetical order of the volumes they carried.

After he was captured by pirates, Diogenes of Sinope was sold as a slave to Xeniades, who had the Cynic philosopher educate his sons. "At home he taught them to attend to their own needs," writes Diogenes Laërtius in his *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, "to live on plain food and water, to wear their hair short and unadorned, to go barefoot and without a tunic, and to be silent and keep their eyes lowered when walking in the streets."

Edith Wharton's childhood German tutor, Anna Bahlmann, also taught her English and American literature; Norse, Greek, and Roman mythology; and history, art, and architecture. In 1878 Wharton called Bahlmann her "supreme critic" in a letter. Bahlmann is mentioned only four times in Wharton's memoir and only once by name. One scholar suggested that Wharton's "conviction about her intellectual and artistic isolation…compelled her to deny her closeness to her teacher."

The first-century Roman writer Gaius Julius Hyginus relates the story of Agnodice, a young Athenian woman who traveled to Alexandria to study medicine. On her return to Athens she disguised herself as a man in order to practice, and was brought before the court of the Areopagus. "You men are not spouses but enemies," Agnodice's patients protested, "since you are condemning the woman who discovered health for us." Around 500 BC, the law forbidding women to study medicine was repealed.

In 1983 the National Commission on Excellence in Education produced the report *A Nation at Risk*, which urged educational reforms such as assigning more homework to students. Three years later, educational researcher Bill Barber protested that homework was "peripheral" to the nation's problems. "We are nothing but amateurs if the best we can muster up for students," he wrote, "is a recommendation that they ought to get more of the same thing."

In October 2021 U.S. secretary of state Mike Pompeo tweeted that "parents should decide what their children are taught in schools." One user responded, "Why even have teachers?" and another, "Why send children to school at all?" A third user quipped, "I think teachers should decide what surgeries people need to have."

Fairy wren nestlings learn "passwords," or unique single notes, from their mothers while still in their eggs; after birth they must use the passwords when calling for food, or the mothers will abandon the nest. In a 2012 study, scientists in Australia experimented with switching eggs and mothers, and found that passwords were not genetically inherited; the chicks assumed the passwords of their adopted mothers.

A 2006 University of Cambridge study found that meerkats teach pups how to hunt by first introducing them to dead prey, then to injured prey; when the pup is ready, the adults present them with live prey. "There were clear post-provisioning costs involved in feeding pups live prey," the researchers wrote. If the prey escaped, the adults were able to recapture it only about 26 percent of the time. "On around 7 percent of occasions, helpers further modified the prey before returning it."

Animal cognition researcher Irene Pepperberg wrote in her study of the African gray parrot Alex that the intelligent bird often became restless when asked to focus on a single task: "He will cease to work, begin to preen, or interrupt with many successive requests." In 1996 Alex appeared on the television show *Turning Point* to demonstrate that he could name the colors, shapes, sizes, and materials of different objects. In the middle of this exercise, he began to respond to Pepperberg's questions with remarks like "Want to go back" and "Want to go eat dinner."

After witnessing a man beating his wife in rural Uttar Pradesh in 2006, Sampat Pal Devi declared, "Unless we start sending our girls to schools, we will continue having this problem." She set up a school and wrote a song to persuade women not to send their daughters to work in the fields: "My husband has learnt English, but I only know Hindi / One day he asked for water, but I got him tomatoes. He slashed me with his belt."

According to a 2021 study published by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, "noninstructional spending" at universities is growing faster than "instructional spending"; between 2012 and 2018, "colleges and universities prioritized hiring less expensive and often less credentialed instructional staff and more expensive administrative staff."

On January 9, 2022, sixteen elite U.S. universities were sued in federal court for offering fraudulent financial-aid packages, overcharging more than 170,000 financial-aid recipients, and conspiring to "reduce or eliminate price competition" in order to establish "a uniform and lower level of aid to all prospective students."

The title track of Van Morrison's 1990 album *Enlightenment* opens with the lyrics "chop that wood, carry water," a reference to the popular Zen Buddhist dictum that before enlightenment, one must chop wood and carry water, and that after enlightenment, one must chop wood and carry water. The origin is a verse by the late eighth-century Chinese poet Layman Pang, who declared that his "supernatural power and marvelous activity" was "drawing water and carrying firewood."

In 2003 about one-third of American babies between six months and two years old had watched a video from the Baby Einstein series, which promised exposure to culture, poetry, music, and foreign languages. A 2007 study reported that babies who watched the videos performed "10 percent lower on language skills" than babies who didn't. Soon afterward, Disney spent about $100 million offering refunds to anyone who bought the videos between 2004 and 2009.

Primary school students in eastern Nigeria are encouraged to focus on their education with a song whose lyrics translate as "Education is sweet but hard to learn, but with patience, you can succeed if your parents have the white man's money."



SCHOOL BELLS

by Lewis H. Lapham

Between the winter primary campaigns and the summer nominating conventions in the year 2000 the two principal candidates for president discovered—much to their dismay and seasonable surprise—"the crisis of literacy" in the nation's public schools. The opinion polls were showing respondents more concerned about the shambles of American education than about any other problem on the political agenda, and for nearly three months on any evening's news broadcast if Al Gore wasn't to be found seated on a tiny classroom chair in North Carolina or Ohio, George Bush was to be seen reading *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* to kindergarten children in California or Wisconsin.

The photo-op was always smiling, the lesson invariably grim. The boys and girls weren't learning how to read, didn't know the difference between an aardvark and an anarchist, couldn't count to twenty or point to California on a map. The time had come to do something "bold" and "innovative," maybe even something "revolutionary," about the rising flood of ignorance that threatened to spill over the sandbags of the American dream. Unless everybody began to pay attention to the instructions on the blackboard, the United States could lose it all—the cruise missiles and the stock options, the ball game and the farm.

The expressions of alarm I take to be a matter of pious ritual, like a murmuring of prayers or the beating of ornamental gongs. If as a nation we wished to improve the performance of the schools, I assume that we could do so. Certainly we possess the necessary resources. We are an energetic people, rich in money and intelligence, capable of making high-performance automobiles and venture-capital funds, and if our intentions were anything other than ceremonial, I don't doubt that we could bring the schools to the standard of efficiency required of a well-run amusement park. Over the past twenty years we have added $10 trillion to the sum of the national wealth, cloned monkeys, reconfigured the weather, multiplied (by factors too large to calculate) the reach and value of the internet.

Why, then, do the public schools continue to decay while at the same time the voices of the proctors poking through the wreckage continue to rise to the pitch of lamentations for the dead? Possibly because the condition of the

From an essay first published as a Notebook column in the August 2000 issue of Harper's Magazine.

Schoolboy, by Paul Klee, 1933.

public schools is neither an accident nor a mistake. The schools today serve the interests of a society content to define education as a means of indoctrination and a way of teaching people to know their place. We have one set of schools for the children of the elite, another for children less fortunately born, and why disrupt the seating arrangement with a noisy shuffling of chairs? Serious reform of the public schools would beg too many questions about racial prejudice, the class system, the division of the nation's spoils. A too well-educated public might prove more trouble than it's worth, and so we mask our tacit approval of an intellectually inferior result with the declarations of a morally superior purpose. The sweet words come easy and cheap, and if often enough repeated, they gain the weight of hard decision and accomplished fact.

Education is fatal to anyone with a spark of artistic feeling.

—George Moore, 1888

If either presidential candidate were to make the mistake of exposing the educational system to the rigors of "revolutionary change," who would thank him for his trouble? Not the politicians, who depend for their safety in office upon an uninformed electorate, apathetic and disinclined to vote, unable to remember its history or name its civil rights. Not the marketers of the gross domestic product, who depend upon the eager and uncritical consumption of junk merchandise in every available color and size. Not the ringmasters of the national media circus, who play to the lowest common denominators of credulous applause. Not the sellers of sexual fantasy, the proprietors of gambling casinos, the composers of financial fraud, the dealers in cosmetics and New Age religion. The consumer society rests on the great economic truth proclaimed by P.T. Barnum (the one about a sucker being born every minute), and the country's reserves of ignorance constitute a natural resource as precious as the Mississippi River or the long-lost herds of buffalo. As a nation we now spend upwards of a trillion dollars a year on liquor, pornography, and drugs, and the cold war against the American intellect yields a higher rate of return than the old arrangement with the Russians. Unless obliged to make a campaign or a commencement speech, who in his right mind would want to kill the geese that lay the golden eggs?

The question sometimes occurs to me when I attend one of those conferences addressed to the sorrows of American education and convened under rubrics along the lines of "Investing in Human Capital: Leadership for the Challenges of the Twenty-First Century." After the keynote speech—usually a requiem for the seventy million functional illiterates in the country unable to read the Constitution or a complicated menu, sometimes a sermon about the high school girl in Oklahoma who thought the Holocaust was a Jewish holiday—the participants adjourn to workshops where they complain about the failure of the schools to deliver "high-quality product to the infrastructure." They seldom discuss the powers of the human intellect or imagination. Construing education as a commodity and the graduating classes as an assembly-line product (like peeled potatoes or empty aluminum cans), they talk about the manufacture of contented computer operators who can process insurance forms and change Italian lire into French francs or British pounds. As often as not it turns out that somebody in the crowd owns a company that leaflets the schools with films, textbooks, and computer software (aka "curriculum materials") touting the wonders of its consumer goods. Revlon offers a lesson in self-esteem that investigates the differences between good and bad hair days; the Campbell Soup Company once handed out the "slotted-spoon test," which asked students to compare the texture of Campbell's Prego with a competitor's Ragú. The students who failed to find Prego the thicker of the two sauces failed the lesson in "the scientific method."

The United States is the only country in the civilized world that grants the commercial interests unfettered access to the minds of its children, and it should come as no surprise



Baby at Play, by Thomas Eakins, 1876.

that the reading skills of American students improve during their primary-school years and then rapidly decline. Once inducted into a sixth- or seventh-grade classroom, they make less progress than their peers in Britain, France, Germany, or Spain. Instruction in the uses of the internet prepares the class for the art of shopping, not for the art of reading.

The official mourners at the bier of American public education never fail to say something sad about "abbreviated attention spans" and the "diminished capacity to think," and apparently it never occurs to them that both those habits of mind sustain the profits of the credit-card industry and the banks.

Nor does it occur to them that if much of what passes for education in the United States deadens the desire for learning, the achievement is deliberate. High schools in large cities possess many of the same attributes as minimum-security prisons—metal detectors in the corridors, zero tolerance for rowdy behavior, the principal a warden and the faculty familiar with the syllabus of concealed weapons. Defined as day-care centers for the restless poor, the schools regulate the supply of unskilled labor, holding adolescents off the market until they have been hobbled by the rope of debt and injected with the virus of unbridled appetites for goods and services they can't afford to buy. The double bind instills the attitudes of passivity and apprehension, which in turn induce the fear of authority and the habits of obedience. An active intelligence tends to ask too many rude questions—of doctors and politicians, of the loan officer at the mortgage company or the nice man at the police station—and the schools do what they can to hold it for ransom and keep it at bay. A study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education found one-third of the country's teachers lacking a thorough knowledge of the subject in which they gave instruction; textbooks that satisfy the requirements of ideological doctrine in lieu of literary expression inoculate the class against the danger of reading. To learn to read is to learn to think, possibly to discover the strength and freedom of one's own mind. Not a discovery that the consumer society wishes too many of its customers to make. Few pleasures equal the joy of the mind when it's being put to creative use, but the commercial markets have an interest in promoting the line of costly synthetics, and against the powers of the individual imagination they offer prescription drugs and prerecorded dreams.

GLOSSARY

academy: From ancient Greek Ἀκαδημία. The college of philosophy situated approximately a mile northwest of Athens' Dipylon Gate, where Plato acquired property c. 387 BC; the academy continued for more than nine hundred years before the emperor Justinian closed it, together with other pagan schools.

Bildungsroman: (*German*) Lit. *Bildung,* education, and *Roman,* novel. A novel that has as its main theme a person's formative years or spiritual education.

brainwashing: The systematic and often forcible elimination from a person's mind of all established ideas, esp. political ones, so that another set of ideas may replace them. Probably after Chinese *xǐ nǎo*, brainwashing; from *xǐ,* to wash, cleanse, and *nǎo,* brain. First attested use: 1959. See *indoctrination*.

college boy: (*U.S. slang*) A prison inmate.

didactic: Of a teaching method, teacher: one that conveys knowledge by formal means such as lectures and textbooks, rote learning, etc. Frequently contrasted (often unfavorably) with teaching methods encouraging greater involvement or creativity.

education: "That which discloses to the wise and disguises from the foolish their lack of understanding."—Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*

erudition: The action or process of training or instructing. Of a coin: perfect workmanship, finish. From Latin *ērudītus*, from *ērudīre,* to instruct, train; from *ē,* out, and *rudis,* rude, untrained.

gymnasium: A place or building for practice of or instruction in athletic exercises; a high school, college, or academy; spec. in Germany and other continental countries, a school of the highest grade designed to prepare students for university. From Greek γυμνάζειν, to train, exercise; lit. to train naked.

hooky: To be away from school without permission. Probably from the slang *hook it*, to make off. First use, 1842.

indoctrination: Instruction; formal teaching. Also spec. the instruction of prisoners of war, et al., in communist doctrines. "I will then pick up the organization man in college, follow him through his initial indoctrination in organization life, and explore the impact of the group way upon him."—W.H. Whyte, 1956. See *brainwashing*.

knowledge box: (a) slang for the head, the brain; (b) frequently depreciative, a school.

learn: To acquire knowledge; from Old English *leornian*, Northumbrian *liorniga*, Old Saxon *lînôn*, Old High German *lirnên*, *lernên*. Not found in Dutch.

lore: The act of teaching; the condition of being taught. Also, in later use, applied to the body of traditional facts, anecdotes, or beliefs relating to some particular subject, e.g., *animal lore*, *bird lore*.

madrassa: In Muslim countries a school of Islamic theology and law; also more generally a school (esp. a secondary school) or institution of higher Islamic education.

matriculate: To enter a name in the register of a university, college, etc., esp. to admit as a member of a university, college, etc.

matura: Final exams young adults (aged 18 or 19) take at the end of their secondary education; the high school exit exam or "maturity diploma" in various European nations. Cf. A-level exams or *Abitur*.

normal school: Of, relating to, or intended for the training of teachers, esp. in Europe and North America. In North America, normal schools trained primary-school teachers. In Europe, different normal schools also trained teachers at secondary and tertiary levels. From classical Latin *normālis,* right-angled.

pedagogue: A schoolmaster, a teacher, esp. a strict, dogmatic, or pedantic one. "Cow'd by the ruling rod, and haughty frowns / of pedagogues severe."—William Somerville, 1735

preceptor: A person who gives instruction; a teacher, a tutor. "History is a preceptor of prudence, not of principles."—Edmund Burke, 1771

pupil: A person who is being taught by another, esp. a schoolchild or student in relation to a teacher. From French *pupille*, an orphan who is a minor and consequently a ward;

kindergarten



From German, lit. children's garden. A school for the instruction of young children according to the method developed by Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852), who in 1837 opened an infant school in Prussia that he originally called the Child Nurture and Activity Institute. Prior to the opening of Froebel's kindergarten, children under the age of seven generally did not attend school.

from classical Latin *pūpillus*, an orphan, ward, minor; in postclassical Latin also a student.

ragged schools: Any of a number of free schools established in the United Kingdom from the early 1840s for the education of the poor. The need for such schools declined with the passing of the 1870 Education Act.

reformatory: An institution to which young offenders are sent as an alternative to prison, typically focusing on education and training rather than punishment.

retraining: The action or process of being trained again, esp. in order to learn new skills required to do a different job. First use, 1840.

scholar: (*depreciative*) A person who possesses academic learning or theoretical knowledge but lacks practical skills or worldly experience. "The scholar often appeared as a stock character in satires of the early modern period, depicted as an object of ridicule by courtiers and gallants, and mocked for being poor, unfashionable, and socially awkward."—*OED*

school: (*v.*) To bring oneself under control; to direct oneself to do something or into a particular state by a process of self-control. "My deerest Cooz, I pray you schoole your selfe."—William Shakespeare, 1606

school butter: (*U.S. regional slang, chiefly Southern*) A flogging. Used as a jeer or taunt for schoolchildren. "*Cob*, or *cobbing*: a punishment used by the seamen for petty offenses or irregularities among themselves…This piece of discipline is also inflicted in Ireland by the schoolboys on persons coming into the school without taking off their hats; it is there called school butter."—Francis Grose, *Classical Dict. of the Vulgar Tongue*

short bus



A school bus used to convey up to 34 students. Also known as a Type A school bus. Collins Bus Corp. first manufactured such a vehicle in 1967; its use became popularly associated with special-needs students after the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975.

schoolmarm: A woman who teaches in a school; a schoolmistress. Also, in extended use, a person exhibiting the prim or didactic behavior conventionally associated with a schoolmistress. Also, North American slang (chiefly forestry), a tree with a forked trunk.

school of hard knocks: A hard life, seen as a means of education.

schooly: Reminiscent or suggestive of a school or pupil; having the typical or traditional characteristics of a school.

science: "Certainty grounded on demonstration."—Samuel Johnson, *Dict. of the English Language*

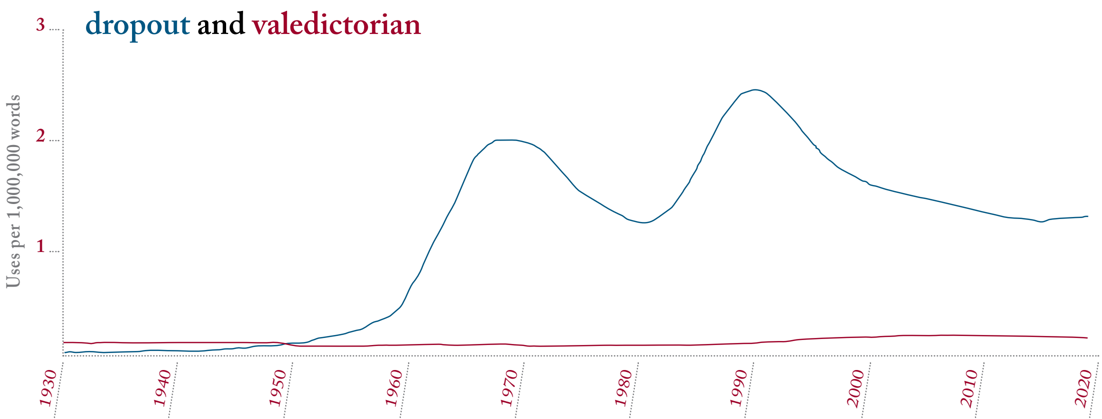
show-and-tell: A classroom exercise in which children display an item and talk about it. First use, 1941.

standardized test: Any test administered, scored, and interpreted in a standard, predetermined manner. The No Child Left Behind Act, which became law in 2002, mandated annual testing in reading and math (and later science) in grades three through eight and again in high school. The Kansas Silent Reading Test (1914–15) is the earliest known multiple-choice test.

teach: In shipbuilding, of a line: to point in a particular direction. "To *teach*, in marine architecture, is applied to the direction which any line or curve seems to point out."—W.H. Smyth and E. Belcher, *Sailor's Word-Book*, 1867

teacher's pet: A derogatory term for a teacher's favorite pupil. "The other employees in the department hated her and nicknamed her Teacher's Pet."—John Dos Passos, 1930

dropout and valedictorian



Based on Google Ngram Viewer. The frequency of the words dropout *and* valedictorian *between 1930 and 2019, from a database of more than 5 million books.*

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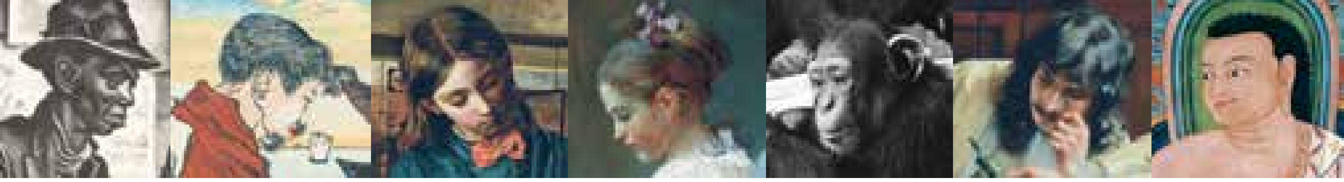
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LAPHAM'S
QUARTERLY

Society as a whole must be converted into a gigantic school.

—Che Guevara, 1965

The Bookworm, by Carl Spitzweg, c. 1850.



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